

Minutes of the Urban Environment Scrutiny Committee

Monday 24th November, 2014 at 6.00 pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

Present:

Councillor D Tyler (Chair)
Councillor A Finch (Vice Chair)
Councillors S Ali, J Cowell, C Hale, P Harley, I Kettle, P Miller, R Scott-Dow and E Taylor.

Officers:

R Sims (Assistant Director, Adult, Community and Housing Services - Housing Strategy and Private Sector), (Lead Officer to the Committee), J Millar (Director of the Urban Environment), J Gray (Policy Manager – Executive Support), N Ford (Manager of Executive Support) (Directorate of the Urban Environment); J Szczechowski (Head of Accountancy), James Croft (Group Accountant) and H Shepherd (Democratic Services Officer) (Directorate of Corporate Resources).

10 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors W Duckworth and N Gregory.

11 **Appointment of Substitute Member**

It was noted that Councillor P Harley had been appointed as a substitute member for Councillor N Gregory for this meeting of the Committee only.

12 **Declarations of interest**

No member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

13 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 1st October, 2014, be approved as a correct record and signed.

14 **Public Forum**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

15 **Medium Term Financial Strategy**

A joint report of the Chief Executive, Treasurer and the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted to consult the Committee on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2017/18 with emphasis on proposals relating to the Committees terms of reference. Items directly specific to this Committee were those in relation to the Directorate of the Urban Environment as set out in paragraph 24 of the report and appendix B of the report submitted.

Following an overview of the report, Members raised issues and comments on the budget proposals as follows:-

- Concerns were raised in relation to the continued overspend relating to Children Services and Looked after Children. It was considered that action needed to be taken by the Cabinet to ascertain a solution or alternative ways of working to ensure that this was not a continual drain on resources.
- Reduction in road reconstruction and resurfacing programme and whether this would be a false economy if it resulted in the Council spending more on potholes, especially if a bad winter was experienced.
- Grounds maintenance and the importance of ensuring well used parks were maintained with appropriate facilities in working order.
- Following the corporate restructure, Housing would be incorporated into the Environment, Economy and Housing Directorate and therefore would further efficiency savings be made from utilising the additional vehicles?
- The reduction of signs and bollard maintenance.
- Concerns of flooding in areas where there was a reduction in gully drainage emptying.
- With reference to paragraph 12 of the report submitted, it was considered that action needed to be taken and a letter directed to Central Government addressing the adverse impact and effects the continued cut in government funding was having on local services.
- In relation to the proposed increase in bereavement charges, it was considered that this was a sensitive issue and the Local Authority must be mindful not to be making a profit and a review of the services and contracts currently provided should be explored.

- Request that a car parking strategy be established and submitted to a future Scrutiny Committee meeting for consideration.
- Concerns about the impact of the switch off of selected street lighting from midnight.
- Consideration be given to the possibility of extending or changing the number of garden waste collections to accommodate the Autumn/Winter falls.

Arising from the comments made, the Director of the Urban Environment responded as follows:-

- Innovative materials would be used for future road maintenance works and that a recycling process was being trialled, but ascertaining the correct balance was essential.
- A significant marketing exercise had taken place on all frontline services within the Directorate, including Grounds Maintenance, and that the outcome identified for improvement was to increase charges and to make services self financing.
- That additional funding for parks was being sourced from Healthy Town grants and sport strategies to ensure parks are developed and of a good standard.
- That the figures referred to in Appendix B of the report in relation to further efficiencies including vehicle utilisation did not incorporate Housing vehicles and that this would be reviewed once the new Directorate was operational.
- A change in street lighting technology and innovative signs and bollards was being trialled which required less maintenance.
- Gully emptying would be closely monitored, particularly known risk areas. He stated that there were two emptying vehicles operational which would concentrate on 'hotspot' areas and that further investment would be put into gullies that were currently overgrown.
- Potential staffing implications equated to the loss of approximately 85 posts by 2017/18 which represented a reduction of 40% compared with 2010. The restructure of teams, voluntary redundancies, redeployment and 'bumping' options would all be considered. Work would need to be prioritised and appreciation would need to be given that response times would be reduced as a result. The Director agreed to provide further details to the Committee in due course.
- Bereavement charges were incorporated into the funeral director fees and that current contracts and services provided would be reviewed.

- Figures in relation to bereavements paid by the Local Authority and whether payment plans would be an option would be provided direct to Members.
- A car parking strategy was in the process of being developed and an overall review of car parking would take place and would be presented to a future meeting of this Committee.
- That the technology used for street lighting enabled various different options to be used i.e. switch off, switch on at different times or dim; all would contribute to energy savings. The switch off of street lighting had been trialled in some areas and no complaints had been received. Non-residential areas would continue to be considered but would be closely monitored.
- That consideration would be given to a change in green waste collections however, an increase in the number of collections would have significant cost implications.

Resolved

- (i) That the Cabinets proposals for the Medium Term Financial Strategy to 2017/18, taking into account the considerations set out in paragraph 36 of the report and appendices to the report submitted, be noted.
- (ii) That the Director of the Urban Environment be requested to provide Members direct with figures in relation to bereavements paid for by the Local Authority and whether payment plans could be an option. In addition, further information on the ongoing office related savings would be supplied.

The meeting ended at 6.55pm.

CHAIR