

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

19 August 2014

The meeting commenced at 9.30 am in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor: Peter Jackson (In the Chair)

Councillors: Jim Ainslie, Allan Barclay and Steve Gibbon

Also Present:

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2 (ii) Councillor Stephen Akers-Belcher was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Marjorie James

Officers: Dave Stubbs, Chief Executive
Denise Ogden, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Alastair Smith, Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods
Alyson Carr, Head of Finance, Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Laura Stones, Scrutiny Support Officer
Denise Wimpenny, Principal Democratic Services Officer

10. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Dawkins, James and Loynes.

11. Declarations of Interest

None

12. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2014

Received

13. Savings Programme 2015/16 – Neighbourhoods (Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)

Type of decision

Budget and Policy Framework

Purpose of report

To identify proposals for the delivery of savings in respect of the Neighbourhood Services Division for consideration as part of the 2015/16 budget process.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods presented the report which included the proposals for delivery of savings in Neighbourhood Services as part of the 2015/16 budget process, the risks associated with the proposals and the financial considerations which had been taken into account in developing the proposals.

The Director outlined in detail the services under consideration as well as details of inputs, outputs and outcomes. The savings target for Regeneration and Neighbourhoods for 2015/16 was £2.250m, £1.135m of which related to Neighbourhood Services and was for Member's consideration today. Details of how the savings target would be achieved was provided as detailed in the report. In addition to this target, the Department needed to find additional savings to offset departmental budget pressures of £170,000, resulting in overall savings of £2.420m to be identified. The scale of budget savings on service delivery had now reached a point where difficult and unpalatable decisions had to be considered by Officers and Members.

Members considered in detail the savings proposals and expressed the following views/queries/comments:-

Road Safety

The Committee supported the proposal to remove initiatives such as bikeability and other road safety educational programmes which would provide a saving in the region of £90K. However, they did not support the proposal to reduce the School Crossing Patrol Service. Members were of the view that if there was a favourable outturn along with the review of reserves that this service should be retained by utilising the outturn and reserves.

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods advised that Officers

would, over the course of the coming months, look to re-establish the “bikeability” and road safety programmes as a ‘buy-back’ service for schools and other groups to purchase. The Director also advised that the department would continue to bid for grant funding to assist in road safety initiatives which may assist in retaining elements of the road safety education programme.

Beach Lifeguard Service

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods responded to issues raised by Members in relation to the Beach Lifeguard Service. Clarification was provided regarding the periods of service operation as well as the roles and responsibilities of the Lifeguards. In response to a suggestion that the duties of Lifeguards be extended to include litter picking duties etc, Members were advised that these issues would be considered as part of a review of the service. Following discussion, the Committee did not support the proposal to cease the operation of the Beach Lifeguard Service. Members were of the view that if there was a favourable outturn along with the review of reserves that this service should be retained, in its current format and level, by utilising the outturn and reserves.

With the exception of the School Crossing Patrol and Beach Lifeguard Service, whilst the Committee agreed the proposed savings outlined in the report, the following views/comments were expressed:-

Parks and Countryside

In response to a Member query in relation to the impact of the proposed reduction of three posts on service delivery, (one vacant post and two ER/VR requests), assurances were provided that the reduction in staffing levels would not affect the running of the service as the service would work alongside other Council Departments.

School Catering

The Committee welcomed the continued increase in take up of school meals and the proposal to remove any general fund subsidy for 2015/16. It was noted that a report would be presented to Members in due course exploring the suggestion at Council that primary school children receive free healthy breakfasts.

Green Waste Collection

The Committee was of the view that the winter period should run from November to end of February rather than to the end of March. Concern was raised about future options regarding the green waste collection. Members acknowledged that proposals to provide a subscribed service were discounted this year but may have to be considered in future years.

Cemeteries and Crematorium

A query was raised as to whether consideration had been given to the new crematorium proposed for the East Durham area in relation to the risk factors and impact that this could have on the Council. Whilst it was acknowledged that the new crematorium should not impact on this service, any loss of revenue should be monitored. In relation to the proposal to review fees and charges with a view to generating an additional £30K income per annum some concerns were raised by a Member in relation to this proposal. Following discussion it was agreed that further information in the form of a spreadsheet would be circulated to Members following the meeting. Following circulation of this information, if Members still had concerns regarding this saving, this would be raised by the Chair at the meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee in September.

Prior to conclusion of the debate the Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods responded to further issues raised by Members in relation to the savings options that had been explored and discounted for the 2015/16 budget process but may need to be considered again as part of the 2016/17 savings proposals.

The Chair thanked Officers for their hard work in identifying the savings proposals and recognised that difficult and unpalatable decisions had to be considered noting the further challenges ahead in 2016/17.

Decision

- (i) That the savings proposals relating to Neighbourhood Services, as set out in the report, be supported with the exception of the School Crossing Patrol and Beach Lifeguard Service for consideration by the Finance and Policy Committee.
- (ii) That the Finance and Policy Committee be asked to consider retention of the School Crossing Patrol and Beach Lifeguard Services by utilising the favourable outturn and reserves.
- (iii) That the contents of the report and comments of Members, as outlined above, be noted and be utilised to formulate a response to be presented to Finance and Policy Committee.

14. Pothole Repair Fund (*Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods*)

Type of decision

Key Decision – Tests (i) and (ii) apply – Ref RN25/14

Purpose of report

To advise Members of a recent successful bid to the Department of

Transport for additional funding for pothole repairs and to seek approval for schemes to be funded by such.

Issue(s) for consideration

The report provided background information to Hartlepool's successful bid for additional funding for pothole repairs of £166,816 from the Department of Transport.

As had been the case with previous Government grants, it was proposed that the money be used to enhance the Highway Maintenance Programme. The grant conditions stated that the funding must compliment planned highway maintenance expenditure for 2014/15 and activities could include permanent pothole repairs or resurfacing to help prevent potholes from forming. To promote greater transparency the Department of Transport expected the Council to publish a quarterly report on its website, copied to the Department, showing how much money had been spent including a quantifiable report on the specific activities that had been undertaken and the location. Details of the proposed schemes were attached at Appendix 1.

With regard to the Highway Maintenance Programme, a Member sought clarification as to whether the programme included pathways and grass verges which were in a state of disrepair. The Assistant Director stated that the Council's existing maintenance programme did include pathways and grass verges. The process for determining the priority of works was outlined and the emphasis placed upon safety as a primary consideration was noted.

The Chair welcomed the report and the approach taken in determining the priority of schemes.

Decision

- (i) That the Highway Maintenance Schemes, as detailed in Appendix 1, be approved.
- (ii) That a quarterly report on progress be published on the Council's website on a quarterly basis.

15. Ward Member Budget – Monitoring Options *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods)*

Type of decision

Non-key decision

Purpose of report

To present the Committee with monitoring options in relation to Ward Member Budget expenditure.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods reported on the background to the decisions taken in relation to Ward Member Budgets and a recent request by the Finance and Policy Committee that a number of potential options be explored for monitoring Ward Member Budget expenditure. The report included details of schemes funded to date, the administration process as well as monitoring options.

Members' views were sought in relation to the following options, details of which were provided as outlined in the report:-

- Option 1 – Full monitoring and verification
- Option 2 – Self assessment monitoring
- Option 3 – Retrospective payments
- Option 4 – Continue with current arrangements

The Committee was referred to the risk, financial and legal considerations of the various options. It was recommended that the Committee considered the monitoring options available and implement a programme of self assessment monitoring (Option 2) for all Ward Member Budget Expenditure.

In the discussion that followed presentation of the report, the majority of Members expressed support for Option 4, to continue with current arrangements given that there had been no complaints in relation to the current process and this was the least resource intensive option for both Council Officers and recipients of funding.

Decision

- (i) That the current framework of delivering the Ward Member Budget Programme (Option 4 – Continue with current arrangements), be approved.
- (ii) With regard to the Civic Lottery Programme, it was agreed that Option 3 (Retrospective payments) continue.
- (iii) That a review of the Civic Lottery Programme delivery options be undertaken, the outcome of which be submitted for consideration to a future meeting of this Committee.

16. Strategic Financial Management Report – As At 30 June 2014 *(Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods and Chief Finance Officer)*

Type of decision

For information

Purpose of report

The report informed Members of the 2013/14 Forecast General Fund Outturn; 2014/15 Capital Programme Monitoring, and provided details for the specific budget areas that the Committee was responsible for.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Head of Finance, Regeneration and Neighbourhoods presented the report which provided the background and financial reporting arrangements for 2014/15 as well as the General Fund budget outturn information in relation to the Neighbourhood Services Department.

As recently reported to the Finance and Policy Committee, Members were advised that there would be an overall underspend in the current year. The net forecast uncommitted budget underspend at the year end was between £0.547m and £0.662m.

Details of the overall budget position for the Regeneration and Neighbourhood Services Department was summarised in a table included in the report which included the reasons for the forecast outturn. Further details of specific budget areas was set out at Appendix A. Members were provided with details of recommended reserves together with planned capital expenditure, as set out in the report.

Decision

That the contents of the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 10.40 am.

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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