

HIGHWAYS AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE: MINUTES

Date: Tuesday 28th October 2014

Time: 10.00am to 1.00pm

Present: Councillors Ashwood, P Brown (substituting for Cllr Criswell), Butcher, Frost, Gillick, Hickford (Chairman), Hunt, McGuire (substituting for Cllr Connor), Mason, Palmer, Reeve (Vice-Chairman), Rouse, Taylor, Tew, van de Ven and Walsh

Apologies: Councillors Connor (Councillor McGuire substituting), Criswell (Councillor P Brown substituting) and Kavanagh

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

45. MINUTES – 23rd SEPTEMBER 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd September 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

46. PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

47. CIVIL PARKING ENFORCEMENT PARKING PROCUREMENT

The Committee received a report on the Civil Parking Enforcement Contract and the proposals for the forthcoming procurement process. It was noted that the current contract ran until April 2015, and covered enforcement personnel and IT system, at an average cost of £700K per annum, which was covered by the income generated for parking services. The renewed contract was likely to lead to significant cost reductions for the Council.

In response to Member questions, it was noted that:

- the Council received income of around £3M per annum from parking, with total costs of around £1.3M;
- the option of bringing services back in-house had previously been investigated, but those costs were in excess of £700K. It was agreed that the information from that review would be made available to the Committee. **ACTION: Nikki Pasek;**
- the actual cost for IT on the current contract was £100K, but it was suspected that this could be reduced to around £40-50K.

A Member queried the statement in the report that the contract was unlikely to be awarded to a small or medium sized enterprise. Officers responded that whilst it was possible, there were a limited number of companies capable of delivering the contract, especially given the training requirements for staff.

Members observed that there were no parking charges in Fenland and East Cambridgeshire districts.

It was resolved to:

- 1) approve the commencement of the procurement for the Civil Parking Enforcement Contract with a separate IT contract for a term of 5 years from April 2015 to March 2019 plus an option to extend; and
- 2) delegate authority to the Executive Director, Economy Transport and Environment, in consultation with the Chairman of the Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee, to appoint contractors following a competitive process and complete all necessary contractual documents in accordance with Council procedures.

48. BUSINESS PLAN REVENUE PROPOSALS

The Committee received a report on revenue proposals for the areas covered by the Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee, for the Business Plan in 2015/16. Introducing the report, the Service Director: Infrastructure Management & Operations reminded Members that these proposals had been discussed in workshops by Members. As Members were aware, the financial challenges facing the Council were extremely demanding, and the situation in subsequent years i.e. 2016/17 onwards was particularly bleak – the proposals presented balanced the budget for the first year only.

The Chairman thanked officers for their hard work and for Committee Members for contributing to the process and providing a steer. It was clarified that proposals would be refined further, following comments by Members at this meeting, and the final proposals would be presented to Committee in November. This would then feed in to the Business Plan proposals considered by full Council in February.

The Chairman invited individual Members to comment on the proposals. The points raised by Members are summarised below under different subject headings:

Streetlighting

A number of Members spoke in favour of dimming or switching off streetlights overnight, commenting that this was a win-win situation, as energy costs and light pollution would both be reduced. However, a number of Members expressed caution, commenting that whilst this may be desirable in some areas of the county, switching off lights altogether was undesirable in certain areas e.g. city centres, crime hotspots or where there were particular concerns about crime, areas where vulnerable people lived/sheltered housing, key employment sites (e.g. in and around

Addenbrookes) and areas which had already lost a significant number of street lights. It was noted that Parish Councils could pay for individual County Council street lights to be retained, at a cost of £15 per annum, although a number of Members observed that this was not an option in Cambridge as there were no Parish Councils: other Members suggested that this option could be considered by the Area Committees in Cambridge. It was also noted that some street lights were already owned and operated by the respective Parish, Town and District Councils.

Waste management and recycling

Members spoke in favour of retaining a number of Waste Recycling Centres (WRCs), including (i) Alconbury, especially given that 5000 new homes were being developed nearby (ii) the site in Witchford; (iii) the three sites in Fenland. It was also suggested that partner organisations such as Town Councils may be willing to pay for WRCs to be kept open, e.g. through increasing precepts.

Some Members cautioned that closing WRCs would lead to an increase in flytipping. It was also suggested that the public would be more accepting of reduced opening hours or days in preference to complete closures.

Winter Maintenance

It was observed that this was one service area which impacted on every resident of Cambridgeshire: even when residents did not have to go out in bad weather, they were usually dependent on individuals travelling to their homes. Members asked if there was any flexibility in the proposed £350K reduction, i.e. rather than cut the routes covered, the Council operated more flexible and intelligent operation of gritting routes could reduce costs. It was confirmed that in the event of a particularly bad winter which required more gritting runs than was usual, the balance of funds was sought from reserves.

The importance of gritting in rural areas, especially alongside deep water and on potentially hazardous bends or junctions, and involving Parish Councils, was stressed. It was also suggested that when determining routes, consideration should be given to isolated communities with no other routes or options.

It was noted that the Met Office had recently announced that it would be purchasing a 'supercomputer' which would enable more accurate forecasting and climate modelling, which could provide more detailed information on which areas to grit.

Some Members pointed out that road safety was ultimately the responsibility of the individual motorist, although this may require a more general shift in culture e.g. introducing winter tyres, in common with much of northern Europe.

A Member noted that dual use pedestrian/cycle routes had not been referred to, and these should be a priority. The Member suggested that the cutting of grass verges could be reduced from three times per annum to once, to pay for those the dual use pedestrian/cycle routes to be gritted.

There was a query regarding the proposed reduction in fleet and move to lease vehicles, and why this would be beneficial.

It was observed that the Council's grit stores were also used by Highways Agency, and it was suggested that the charges for this arrangement should be increased.

It was agreed that copies of the gritting routes would be circulated to the Committee.

Grass cutting of verges

Further reductions to grass cutting were supported by a number of Members, as long as safety issues were observed e.g. access/egress visibility splays. It was also suggested that Parish Councils could have a greater role in the cutting of verges.

Communications

A Member suggested that there was no justification for a County Council communications team.

Community grants

It was clarified that these grants excluded Community Transport, which was under the remit of the Economy & Environment Committee. A number of Members commented that they were keen to see grants maintained, especially to key organisations e.g. Citizens' Advice Bureaux. It was observed that these grants were crucial to some small community organisations, but there may be scope for grants to be withdrawn from larger concerns which were less reliant on this funding.

Library Service

Most Members who expressed a view on libraries stressed the need to fully utilise library buildings, looking at innovative ways for the building to be used by communities, partner organisations and let to businesses/commercial use to generate an income. A number of Members commented that greater use should be made of volunteers, and cited the example of Northamptonshire where significant changes had been made to the service and suggested lessons could be learned. It was also pointed out that some of the smaller libraries which were now Library Access Points (LAPs) operated by their local communities did not want to see a return to Council run services, as they preferred the independence of their new way of working.

A number of Members commented that libraries had less of a role now than when they were originally set up, as traditional reading habits and technologies had changed. Some Members stressed the value of libraries, stressing that they were not just about books, but provided valuable community access, and were particularly important e.g. branch libraries in the more deprived areas of Cambridge, where there were often residents who would otherwise not have access to books or computers.

It was noted that there had been numerous reviews of library services over recent years, and a Member commented that a more fundamental, radical review of libraries was required.

Other points raised by individual Members included:

- members of the public were often unhappy when major, multimillion pound Council schemes went ahead but relatively low cost, essential services e.g. pot hole repairs were not undertaken;
- observed that Parish Councils were often resistant to changes and cuts, but when the rationale was explained, they were more accepting – Members had a key role in explaining the extent of the Council's financial challenges to the public and their Parishes. It was also suggested that roadshows could be held for Parish Councils to keep them informed of what was happening;
- commented that when services were transferred to partners or e.g. Parish Councils paying for street lights, payment arrangements need to be well set up, to avoid bureaucracy and pressure on staff;
- asked if there were any issues in capitalising road repairs in the coming year, specifically whether the Auditors were happy with this proposal. It was confirmed that this arrangement was acceptable, and that savings made in the coming year e.g. the £800K savings would also be made in future years;
- a number of Members suggested that there were real opportunities for Localism i.e. moving services to Parish Councils and giving communities a real choice as to whether they wanted services or not e.g. street lights, winter maintenance. Parish Councils could raise precepts and were not capped, and were often keen to take on additional responsibilities. Another Member cited the good examples of Huntingdon and Ramsey Town Councils, and Councillor Criswell's work on Localism;
- suggested that there should be greater emphasis on Community Impact Assessments (CIAs) and efforts made to preserve services for the most vulnerable, or where there would be a disproportionate impact on vulnerable members of the community;
- acknowledging that it was under Economy & Environment Committee's remit, suggested that priority should be given to the Fenland Learning Centres, and that that Committee should seek to eliminate or reduce the proposed reduction to this budget. It was noted that the proposed reduction was in Year 2 (i.e. 2016/17) ;
- queried if there was a statutory limit to the road safety service that had to be provided, and suggested that given the relatively small budget, services should be maintained;
- requested evidence that all means had been taken by the leadership to present the Council's case and lobby government for adequate funding, pointing out that some Districts had had their settlements uplifted following successful lobbying by their Leaders. Members also sought reassurance that other Service Committees were facing the same difficult decisions as Highways & Community Infrastructure;
- suggested that the level of administrative support e.g. Personal Assistants should be reviewed and minimised wherever possible.

Responding to the points raised, the Service Director:

- stressed the need to think holistically across the Council and beyond. There was a long history of partnership working e.g. District Council colleagues with RECAP, to review working practices and deliver efficiencies;
- observed that many Services impact on vulnerable people and that this was reflected in the Community Impact Assessments (CIAs). However, the level of cuts required would inevitably have an impact on vulnerable people;
- confirmed it was possible to review the winter maintenance proposals and the scope for flexibility within the budget. Reductions to winter maintenance budgets had to be balanced against the potential for insurance claims to increase;
- agreed that Parish Councils could raise precepts, but cautioned against cost shunting;
- noted that there were some very different ideas from Members on the direction library review should take, and observed that the inclusive ethos of libraries remained, but that this could be blended more with greater community input;
- advised that the total cost of community grants was £45K, and there had been a proposal to remove this completely, but following discussions with Spokes, the proposal was for phased reductions in the total level of community grants;
- advised that officers were delivering efficiencies wherever possible, e.g. office space was being rationalised by closing Castle Court, with Castle Court ETE based staff based moving to Shire Hall;
- confirmed that his team was working with Northamptonshire and other authorities on the Libraries Review, and Sue Grace (currently Cambridgeshire's Director: Customer Service and Transformation) had been invited to join the Project Board;
- advised that the Communications savings identified in the proposals related to Trading Standards and public protection;
- reported that the Road Safety team was working in partnership with Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Peterborough City Council. Casualty figures had reduced over recent years, but this trend was now levelling out;
- responded on some of the street-lighting issues, and the likely process to identify which street lights should be switched off overnight. It was anticipated that around 50% would be switched off overnight, and it was noted that newly installed lights were dimmed overnight, and there had been very few complaints. Major employment sites such as Addenbrookes usually had their own lighting and main access roads would most likely be classed as traffic routes and therefore not affected by the proposal;
- advised that the future of household waste recycling centres, including opening hours, would be looked at as part of a wider review of the waste service, as these form part of the PFI.

The following amendments to the recommendations were proposed:

The Chairman proposed an amendment which was seconded by Councillor Hunt:

to request officers, in consultation with the Chairman, to review the winter maintenance budget proposals to explore a more flexible approach, and report back to the November Committee meeting

On being put to the vote, the amendment was carried.

Councillor Taylor proposed an amendment, which was not seconded:

To request officers to investigate whether there was scope for flexibility in identifying street lights to be dimmed/switched off overnight.

Councillor Walsh proposed an amendment, which was seconded by Councillor Taylor:

To request officers to investigate whether street lights can be dimmed in inverse proportion to the number of street lights lost in that street.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

Councillor van de Ven proposed an amendment, which was seconded by Councillor Taylor:

To request officers to investigate stopping discretionary third cuttings of grass verges (i.e. where not required on safety grounds) and use the savings to grit dual use footpaths/cycleways across the county.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

The Vice-Chairman proposed an amendment, which was not seconded:

To request, through the General Purposes Committee, that sufficient efforts had been made nationally to lobby for the County Council's case for increased Government funding.

Councillor van de Ven proposed an amendment, which was seconded by Councillor Walsh:

To reduce the savings identified in Community Grants, so that local groups could continue to be supported.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

It was resolved to:

- 1) to note the overview and context provided for the 2015-20 Revenue Proposals for Economy, Transport and Environment
- 2) to comment on the draft proposals for Economy, Transport and Environment's 2015-20 revenue budgets to allow further development prior to presentation to Committee again in November
- 3) to request officers, in consultation with the Chairman, to review the winter maintenance budget proposals to explore a more flexible approach, and report back to the November Committee meeting.

49. SERVICE COMMITTEE AGENDA PLAN AND APPOINTMENTS

The Committee noted its agenda plan.

It was resolved to:

- 1) note the agenda plan.