

MEETING OF HIGHWAYS AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE POLICY AND SERVICE COMMITTEE: MINUTES

Date: Tuesday 13th February 2018

Time: 10:00am – 12.05pm

Present: Councillors H Batchelor, I Gardener, M Howell, B Hunt (Vice-Chairman), S King, P Raynes, T Sanderson, J Scutt, M Shuter (Chairman) and A Taylor

In attendance: Councillor L Nethsingha

Apologies: Councillor Howell (Cllr Bates substituting)

50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

51. MINUTES AND ACTION LOG

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th January 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Action Log was noted.

52. PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

53. LIBRARY SERVICE TRANSFORMATION

The Committee received a report on a proposed package of improvements to the Library Service. Councillor Raynes, as Chairman of the cross party working group, was invited to introduce this item.

Councillor Raynes started by thanking the Members involved in the Group, in particular Councillors Scutt and Taylor, and highlighted the following points:

- the focus was on libraries in the context of change – people do not use libraries in the same way they used to, these proposals would move to a phase where library transformation was a given;
- the fantastic network of libraries across the county, and the support for this piece of work by officers, including the Executive Director for Place and Economy, and the Chief Executive, which will ensure more joined up work across services;
- how finances for the Library Service had roughly halved since 2010, and that this had been achieved without closing libraries and maintaining a far-reaching library service, albeit with some reduced level of service.

Members asked for their thanks be recorded to Councillor Raynes and the other Members who formed the cross-party working group, for all their hard work.

Members received a presentation (*emailed to all Members and available at https://cmis.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/ccs_live/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/906/Committee/7/Default.aspx*)

Councillor Nethsingha addressed the Committee. She echoed Committee Members' praise for those Members involved in the Working Group, and advised that she supported most of the proposals. However, she was concerned about charging for internet use in libraries, as this conflicted with one of the main objectives of libraries, as a place which gave access to information to all, and helped level inequalities. Internet access at libraries were used by those on low incomes, and those living in rural communities where there was poor internet access. Whilst the report conceded that access to .gov.uk websites would still be free of charge, there were numerous other types of websites, e.g. banks, which should also be included. It was unlikely that charging for internet access would bring in much money, and it would be labour intensive to enforce. A petition had recently been set up and 521 individuals had signed it in just four days, from across the county.

In response to a question, Councillor Nethsingha reiterated that she supported most of the proposals and the view to increase commercialisation e.g. charging for room hire, and joining up with other Council services. Whilst not supporting having Children's Centres *in* libraries, there were many examples such as Cambourne where libraries and Children's Centres had been successfully co-located.

A Member commented that exceptions should be made for job seekers/those on Universal Credit, where there was an expectation that they should be looking for work for at least two hours a day.

One Member commented that whilst she supported the general direction of travel, i.e. increased commercialisation, she did not support proposals such as charging for internet access. She also opposed the introduction of the Premium service, which suggested some library users would have improved access to services or resources by paying a membership fee.

The Chairman noted that it was forecast that charging for internet usage would generate income of £110,000. Whilst a number of Members had expressed concerns with regard to the charging, one of the objectives was to stop those library users who monopolised computers in libraries for long periods, often just using social media, as opposed to work/study. He suggested that if the Committee agreed to the internet charging proposal, Members could ask officers to bring back a report to the September meeting on how it was working. The intention of the proposal was not to restrict access to those who really do need that access, but to stop library users sitting there all day.

A Member commented that whilst supporting the report, he wondered whether there were further opportunities for joining up with other Council services e.g. in Northamptonshire, Registration services were co-located at libraries. Officers advised that Registration services were already co-located in March, and co-location was planned for Huntingdon and some other libraries. The intention was to co-locate

most Registration services across the county with other Council services (not necessarily libraries).

Councillor Batchelor proposed an amendment to withdraw the charge for internet access:

Add to recommendation (b) *“With the exception of charging for computer access”*.

In discussing the amendment, the following points were made:

- A Member asked how the financial consequences would be dealt with i.e. loss of income. Another Member agreed, saying that to put such a hole in the budget would be irresponsible. It was suggested that other income generating proposals could be enhanced e.g. room hire charges or charging language schools;
- Councillor Scutt advised that she would abstain from the amendment, because although she opposed charging for internet access, there were other elements in the proposals which she disagreed with;
- Councillor Raynes confirmed that the cross-party working group did discuss the charging proposals pretty thoroughly, which was why the proposal included targeted exemptions e.g. school children, job seekers, and he had understood that what was being put forward to Committee had cross party support. Both Councillors Scutt and Taylor advised that they had articulated their concerns about the charging at the Working Group meetings, and added that they had only been invited to the later meetings of the Working Group;
- a Member commented that it was difficult to list the exemptions required for a job seeker – these would include not just .gov.uk websites and job agencies, but also the websites of individual companies and industrial bodies – this was potentially far too broad to list exemptions. Additionally, she pointed out that some computers in libraries had been funded through Lottery or government funding, on the condition that they provided social access (officers advised that all the externally funded computers had subsequently been replaced). She also asked how the projected income figures had been derived, as it was likely that usage would drop off if it was chargeable, in the same way Park & Ride parking charges had impacted on usage of Park & Ride sites. It was agreed that officers would investigate the feasibility of adding other websites to the free internet usage part of the proposal. **Action required;**
- a Member asked if staff time had actually been factored in to the costs. She also commented that whilst the main objection to charging was so that computers could be used for essential purposes such as job seeking, she felt that those without internet access and those on low incomes should also be able to use library computers for social and leisure purposes, as this had many benefits. Another Member commented that the danger here was that individuals monopolised library computers and it was difficult for others to use the computers and for staff administer;

- Councillor Raynes stressed the transformative nature of the proposals – they were not set in stone for the foreseeable future, if the commercial and pricing policy did not work, they would be revisited. There were a number of other revenue earners that could be flexed if exemptions do not work in practice and enable particular vulnerable groups full access to services;

Summarising, Councillor Batchelor said that the proposed internet charges were unfair and unjust, especially as in some rural areas internet access was poor or non-existent: members of certain communities should not be excluded.

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

Councillor Scutt advised that she agreed with the proposals on higher Room hire charges, prominent donation boxes, charging for language schools. However she did not agree with locating Children's Centres in libraries, charging for events or the concept of "Library Extra", the latter creating special privileges for those who could afford it.

In response to a Member question, it was confirmed that the Library Service's list of charges were reviewed and submitted every year, e.g. late fines, CD and DVD loan charges. There was potential to increase income from room bookings by about 25%, as the rates were currently quite low.

A number of Members welcomed the proposals, and observed that they were the culmination of ideas from various individuals and groups, including the Income generation group chaired by Councillor Ashwood in the previous Council.

Other points raised by individual Members included:

- how to engage with Town and Parish Councils on this issue;
- promotion of the Open Plus system, which had worked well in libraries such as St Ives;
- stressed the ongoing nature of the library transformation process;
- stressed the value of mobile libraries, which were valued greatly by their communities;
- stressed that new libraries e.g. Northstowe start with the vision, so that they did not have to be retrofitted;
- the importance of the Committee keeping a watching brief on this issue.

It was resolved, by a majority, to:

- a. Agree the role and function of the Library Service and endorse the approach outlined in the report;
- b. Agree to the proposals around income generation and commissioning; and
- c. Note the ongoing programme of work to transform the Library Service, which will be informed by feedback from stakeholders;

- d. Agree that the Libraries Transformation Members Steering Group has served its purpose and can now be dissolved, but officers to bring back a progress report to September Committee, in particular on how charging for internet usage was working in practice.

54. PARKING SCHEMES AND CHARGES

The Committee considered a report on proposed residents' permit charges, and a proposed addition to the Residents' Parking Scheme Policy. Members were reminded that a report had been presented to Committee in November 2017, at which point officers were asked to review proposals for residents' parking charges, in particular visitors' permit charges and the types of permits available.

The key elements of the report were outlined, including the increase in the current Visitors' Permit Fee from £8.00 to £12.00 (the November 2017 report having proposed £15). Attention was also drawn to the forecast budgetary impact of the proposed changes to Residents' and Visitors' Permits. One free annual Visitors Permit was available for Blue Badge holders. It was also proposed that there would be additional flexibility, with the agreement of both the local Member and the Chairman of the Committee for local businesses. Another addition was the creation of a contingency fund, to counter unintended consequences, in relation to the implementation of new schemes, and an additional recommendation was proposed as follows:

Creation of a contingency fund for each new scheme to allow minor unintended consequences arising from the rollout of resident's parking schemes, within the first twelve months of a scheme's operation to be addressed. Measures to be implemented from this fund to be agreed in consultation between the Chair of the Committee and the local County Councillor.

This had been agreed jointly with the Greater Cambridge Partnership, to deal with inevitable teething troubles, should they arise.

Councillor Nethsingha welcomed the proposals, and in particular the flexibility to introduce schemes, as making relatively small changes will help the introduction of schemes and taking these forward: it was agreed that details of any such changes could be brought back to Committee, for noting.

In discussion, Members welcomed the proposed changes, and in particular the flexibility and contingency fund, to deal with issues associated with displacement. Discounts and concessions for Blue Badge and Free Medical permits were discussed, and it was noted that doctors had to fill in a form for the latter, and that it was unlikely that there was a charge for this. It was also noted that there was no limit to the number of Free Medical permits that could be requested, as a resident may have complex care needs with different visitors visiting at different times of day.

A Member commented that the report appeared to work in favour of those with cars, rather than discouraging car ownership, and that those without cars were subsidising car owners.

It was noted that the fees had not been revisited since 2011, but that they would be reviewed annually in future, and in the interests of good practice, the public would be informed of/consulted on the annual increases.

There was a discussion around Business Permits, and a Member suggested that the size of business should be considered when issuing such permits.

The Committee thanked officers and all those involved in incorporating improvements to these proposals.

It was resolved unanimously to approve:

- a) The Residents' Parking Permit Charges;
- b) An addition to the Residents' Parking Scheme Policy to allow valid blue badge holders to apply for one free visitors permit per annum;
- c) An addition to the Residents' Parking Scheme Policy that enables specific local circumstances to be accommodated by agreement between the Chairman of Highways & Community Infrastructure Committee and the Local County Councillor. This will be applicable to new schemes introduced from 2018 onwards;
- d) Agree to the creation of a contingency fund for each new scheme to allow minor unintended consequences arising from the rollout of resident's parking schemes, within the first twelve months of a scheme's operation to be addressed. Measures to be implemented from this fund to be agreed in consultation between the Chairman of the Highways & Community Infrastructure Committee and the local County Councillor.

55. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT – DECEMBER 2017

The Committee received a report presenting financial and performance information for Economy, Transport and Environment (ETE) for December 2017.

The only material change on Revenue since the previous report was the forecast overspend on Winter Maintenance (£112K) due to a higher than usual number of gritting runs to date. This could increase or reduce, depending on the weather conditions and therefore number of gritting runs required for the rest of the season. On the Capital side, there was an additional £781K slippage in Operating the Network, where one of the signals schemes, funded from developer contributions, would be delayed until 2018/19.

Looking at performance, a Member expressed concern at the increase from the forecast 299 KSI (Killed and Seriously Injured) to an actual figure of 408. He asked if the cause for this dramatic increase needed to be identified, or if there was a statistical explanation for this. Officers advised that a Road Safety report would be considered at the March meeting of the Committee, and that would cover this increase in detail, including the measures being undertaken to tackle it.

In response to a question on energy usage for street lighting, it was confirmed that the PFI programme had installed energy efficient bulbs but not LED bulbs. The cost of changing the top of lanterns so that LED bulbs could be used was not cost

effective, but any new columns would have LED lanterns. The Member suggested that a brief explanatory note would be helpful in future reports. **Action required.**

There was a discussion on Section 38 agreements and road adoptions. Officers explained that the key difficulty was getting to the point of adoption – the Council could not insist that roads were presented for adoption.

A Member commented that LHI projects appeared to be going too slowly, although it was clarified that the figures presented in the report were as at 31/10/17, i.e. mid year, by which point approximately half the projects were completed, suggesting that the LHI programme was on schedule. Officers added that the LHI process had been refined over recent years, with a feasibility phase introduced so members knew that projects were achievable. However, recruitment to vacant posts was an ongoing issue, and officers were working with colleagues in HR and recruitment agencies in an effort to attract and recruit the right people. Officers were asked to provide a clearer breakdown to Committee (**attached at Appendix 1**).

With regard to the email circulated to Committee, clarifying what was meant by the gap in classified road condition in Fenland, a Member suggested that this particular Performance Indicator needed revisiting.

It was resolved, to:

review, note and comment on the report.

56. HIGHWAYS AND COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE AGENDA PLAN, TRAINING PLAN AND APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

The Committee considered its agenda plan and training plan.

The following items were added to the Agenda Plan:

- LHI item (June meeting);
- Libraries item (September meeting).

In discussing items for the Training Plan, the following were agreed:

- The Highways training would be expanded to include key highways policies and would, and simple fact sheets would be provided describing key highway policies. This would take place on the scheduled Member Seminar date of 11th May (10:00am) to maximise attendance from all Members;
- Individual Members visiting services, such as Coroners, Trading Standards, could be arranged by contacting the Democratic Services Officer;
- The Community and Cultural Services 'package tour' had not been arranged but would be progressed in the coming months, and details circulated.

It was resolved to:

1. note the agenda plan and training plan, including the updates provided orally at the meeting.

Chairman