

ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 6.30 pm on 31 January 2011

Present:

Councillor William Huntington-Thresher (Chairman)
Councillor Lydia Buttinger (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Kathy Bance, Jane Beckley, Ellie Harmer,
Samaris Huntington-Thresher, Nick Milner, Tom Papworth,
Ian F. Payne and Richard Scoates

Also Present:

Councillor Peter Fortune and Councillor Colin Smith

83 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF ALTERNATE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Councillor Michael Turner.

84 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

85 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ATTENDING THE MEETING

A) QUESTIONS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO HOLDER

There were no questions to the Portfolio Holder.

B) QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAIRMAN OF THE ENVIRONMENT PDS COMMITTEE

There were no questions to the Committee.

86 DRAFT 2011/12 BUDGET

Report ES11004

Concerning the draft 2011/12 Budget for the Environment Portfolio Members considered proposed savings options. At its meeting on 12th January 2011 the Executive requested that each PDS Committee consider the proposals arising from the report entitled "*The Local Government Finance Settlement 2011/12 to 2012/13 and Related Budget Issues*".

Details of the savings options were reported to Members and the Director introduced the item. He referred to consultation with all Departmental contractors to look for savings, highlighted the renewal of the street Cleaning contract from 1st April 2012, and referred to expenditure pressures within Environmental services.

In discussion the Vice-Chairman noted the potential cost for waste collection and disposal at each new property in the borough and enquired how this balanced against Council tax received for the properties. The Director offered to take this away for officer consideration.

Enquiries were made about the proposal to reduce the cost of allotments rented by the Council from landowners. The Assistant Director (Street Scene and Green Space) understood that this was connected to a removal of subsidy in some cases where the allotments were not on Council land. The rent of those allotments would then be a market transaction, where the Council need not be involved.

Councillor Kathy Bance asked about the scope for making further savings such as leaving road pot holes unrepaired. The Director indicated that without regular maintenance the highways asset would further deteriorate leaving a major repair cost for the future. Responding to a further question from Councillor Bance on waste costs for schools, the Director explained that schools would be charged total costs i.e. collection and disposal costs (schools were already charged for collection costs). The Portfolio Holder also explained that a number of secondary schools were likely to become academies and would then be expected to have responsibility for their own waste collection and disposal arrangements.

The Chairman suggested that the Committee's Waste Minimisation Working Group could look at matters concerned with green garden waste and the future availability of caddy bags for food waste. Similarly the Chairman explained that the Highways Asset Working Group proposed for next year could include consideration of matters concerned with lamp columns.

The Vice Chairman enquired whether there was any further scope for back office savings. The Director indicated that significant management costs had already been taken out. The back office for the Department was small and a review had been requested with some savings already factored into the savings proposed. However it was not possible to foresee any further significant savings. The Assistant Secretary (Transport and Highways) referred Members to line 22 of the budget options explaining that one post proposed for deletion was concerned with contract monitoring. Although there was a degree of risk associated with the deletion (losing one post from a complement of four) the risk would be higher if the Department was dealing with a new contractor. Councillor Ian Payne felt that it was important not to cut back services if that meant that consultants would need to be brought in - this he felt would cost more in the long term.

Councillor Bance expressed concern for any deletion of School Crossing Patrols (line 18) and felt that other environment savings should be increased to allow their retention. Members were advised that there would be engagement with schools so that volunteers could provide their own crossing patrols and engineering options would also be considered. The Portfolio Holder explained that it was proposed to rearrange provision in 2012/13 and it was now necessary to look at new ways to deploy the service. Councillor Bance felt that this was a health and safety issue - Councillor Payne commented that there was a parental responsibility for road safety. Councillor Tom Papworth enquired whether the effectiveness of school crossing patrols had been quantified and Councillor Samaris Huntington-Thresher asked if there was any data on the use of school crossing patrols.

Councillor Samaris Huntington-Thresher also enquired about revenue generation. On sponsorship the Director explained that there were significant difficulties associated with additional lamp post advertising. He also summarised the position on the three key income streams and indicated that officers would continue to look at income considerations in future years. The Director also indicated that officers would be happy to look at any ideas and approaches taken by other authorities.

Councillor Payne suggested having a school crossing patrol sponsored by a major retailer. The Director indicated that supermarkets were working at a national level on matters concerned with corporate social responsibility rather than at a local level. Concerning revenue raising streams, the Director confirmed that the fee was set for utility companies on street works and by statute could not be profit making. For Trade Waste fees the Director confirmed that costs were covered and there was a small profit. The Portfolio Holder indicated that if Trade Waste fees were increased too much there could be an increase in fly tipping. On car parking fees the Portfolio Holder felt that it was important not to stifle the health of shopping parades and town centres.

Councillor Jane Beckley suggested a reduction in grass cutting. The Director explained that this was considered a few years ago but caused difficulties for residents. Although the Chairman referred to difficulties in areas for wild parks and flowers becoming unkempt, he felt that the idea was not one that should be excluded completely. As a one-off measure he felt that consideration could be given to the frequency of cuttings e.g. one less cut per year and then review the position. Councillor Beckley referred to the wild meadow at High Elms and the Chairman suggested that the suggestion could be considered as a policy development area in the next few years if a green space working group was supported at a future Committee meeting.

Concerning line 26 and lamp column replacements the Chairman suggested that proposed 2012/13 savings be investigated by the Committee's Highways Assets Working Group proposed for next year. Councillor Papworth asked if exceptions could be made to a slower pace of lamp column replacement where there were safety implications. In reply the Chairman indicated that this was an area that could be looked at by the Highways Assets Working Group –

however safety implications were already taken into account when options such as steel lamp dimming were proposed.

Concerning a proposed increase in the price of Green Garden Waste (GGW) stickers to enable the collection service to fully recover costs, the Director explained that a Portfolio Holder decision was necessary to bring this into effect - it was requested that a decision be taken by the Portfolio Holder following the Committee's consideration of the matter.

Councillor Samaris Huntington-Thresher commented that the rate of increase in the proposal could affect the elderly and those for whom it was difficult to access a waste disposal site. She preferred to see evidence of service usage and the Chairman suggested that the matter be looked at in greater detail by the Waste Minimisation Working Group e.g. whether to consider recovering costs and whether a case could be made for efficiencies.

Councillor Payne expressed his support for the price increase and suggested that where financial difficulty was experienced, residents could approach neighbours for help in accessing the GGW sites. The Director indicated that the price of stickers had been £1 for a long time and should be increased to £1.60.

Councillor Bance wished to record her opposition to the budget options generally particularly the deletion of School Crossing Patrols (but excluding the GGW option).

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the Committee's comments be referred to the Executive for consideration; and**
- (2) the Committee wished to record that it had scrutinised the GGW stickers budget line, with the recommendation that the Portfolio Holder take account of the Committee's discussion on the matter when taking any decision.**

The Meeting ended at 7.45 pm

Chairman