

CORPORATE AND PUBLIC SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 November 2016 at 6.00pm at the Council House, Walsall

Panel Members Present	Councillor A. Andrew (Chair) Councillor C. Creaney Councillor S. Craddock Councillor A. Nazir Councillor L. Rattigan Councillor G. Sohal Councillor M. Ward Councillor R. Worrall
Portfolio Holder	Councillor S. Coughlan – Leader Councillor D. Coughlan – Social Care Councillor J. Fitzpatrick – Community, Leisure and Culture Councillor L. Jeavons – Deputy Leader and Regeneration Councillor C. Jones – Clean and Green Councillor A. Nawaz – Personnel and Business Support Councillor I. Shires – Agenda for Change
Officers Present	Julie Alderson – Executive Director (Change and Governance) James Walsh - Assistant Director (Finance) Mark Holden - Head of Clean and Green Chris Holliday - Head of Leisure, Culture and Operations Mark Lavender - Head of Programme Management Steve Pretty – Head of Planning, Transport and Engineering Chris Knowles – Services Finance Manager Craig Goodall – Senior Democratic Services Officer
In attendance	Mr Daryl Magher Ms. S. Moore Mr Roy Watson – Trustee of the New Art Gallery Mr Stan Zetie – Save Streetly Library

137/15 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D. Barker and M. Nazir.

138/15 Substitutions

There were no substitutions.

139/15 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

140/15 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to be considered in private session.

141/15 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Senior Democratic Services Officer reported that the word 'final' had been replaced with the word 'interim' in resolution 1 of item 133/15 'Interim report of the Remembrance Day Working Group' in the version of the minutes that would be signed by the Chairman.

Resolved

That the minutes, as amended, of the meeting held on 18 October 2016 copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

142/15 Petitions on unauthorised encampments

The Committee considered two petitions that had been handed in concerning unauthorised encampments. Both petitions had received over 500 signatures so, in accordance with the Councils petition scheme, required a response at the relevant overview and scrutiny committee.

The Chair invited the petitioners to address the committee. Mr Magher stated that the recent injunction against unauthorised encampments on 12 named sites was to be applauded. He welcomed the identification of Town and Village Green status for Delves Green. He noted previous poor experience with engagement by the Council, Police and Councillors and called for all partners to work together with the local community to identify further solutions. He reported that it was possible to apply for 'Awards for All' funding to further this work. Councillor Rattigan explained the reasons for the petition and noted that the local community was reassured by the recent injunction and preventative measures put in place. However, she reported that local residents were concerned that there was still potential access through the barriers on Millfield Road. Ms Moore, Rushall resident, asked a series of questions about the injunction, the security measures put in place and how land would be cleared following an unauthorised encampment.

The Portfolio Holder (Community, leisure and culture) responded to the petition. She explained that in order to reduce the frequency of unauthorised encampments the Council had gained an injunction against named individuals and persons unknown from engaging in anti-social behaviour connected with

an unauthorised encampment. The injunction also named 12 sites where there had been a high frequency of unauthorised encampments. She added that it was important to engage with those communities living a travelling lifestyle and to provide for their welfare. The Regulatory Services Manager reported that there was ongoing regional work to develop a more strategic approach to managing unauthorised encampments moving forward.. The Portfolio Holder (Clean and Green) added that the next steps for Delves Green now Town and Village Green status had been confirmed were being investigated.

The Committee debated issues relating to the petition. The principal points from the ensuring discussion were as follows:

- The injunction was broadly welcomed by Members, although the issue of displacing unauthorised encampments to other areas and sites was noted.
- Some Members felt the consideration should be given to including additional sites under the injunction such as Aldridge Airport and Northfield Way;
- There were no transit sites in the borough or the Black Country. Opportunities for funding for a suitable site were to be pursued by the West Midlands Combined Authority. Further to this it was felt that additional static sites were required in order to improve engagement with the traveller community and encourage settlement;
- It was noted that not all travellers engaged in anti-social behaviour;
- A review of how the council co-operated and engaged with residents was set to take place.

The Chair thanked the petitioners for attending the meeting and presenting.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. Cabinet explore opportunities to work with the local community to access external funding to tackle unauthorised encampments;**
- 2. Vehicle access to Millfield Way be reviewed;**
- 3. The Committee be kept informed of any further extensions of the injunction against unauthorised encampments.**

143/15 Rebalancing the budget: options for consultation

Members considered medium term financial outlook for the four year period 2016/17 to 2019/20 including savings proposals under the remit of the Committee.

The Leader introduced the report explaining that the four year financial outlook presented ever reducing budgets. He stated local government was being underfunded but the Council would strive to put vulnerable people first. Work was commencing in transforming the council including investment in IT.

He emphasised that the options put forward were for consultation and that decisions would be taken at a later date.

A Member noted the financial challenges facing local authorities and accepted that service changes were required, however, he expressed a view that several of the proposed budget options would not happen or were not achievable and questioned the purpose of including them as potential budget savings. In response the Leader acknowledged that as the proposals were at a consultation stage there could well be proposals that were not implemented. He explained Cabinet would listen to the views of the community, including scrutiny, and take their views into account before making any decisions.

The Chair invited each portfolio holder to present their savings to the Committee. The following is a summary of the discussion on savings that were discussed by Members broken down by portfolio.

Clean and Green

Saving 17 – Introduce charging for garden waste collections

The Committee explored this proposal in depth. Members queried a number of areas, including the appropriateness of the fees, how the policy would be enforced in year 2 and whether or not there would be discounts for pensioners. The Committee were concerned that some residents would choose not to participate in the scheme and put their garden waste into the black bin for landfill. The view was also expressed that the introduction of a fourth wheelie-bin could cause problems for some households.

The Portfolio Holder explained the proposed charging system and that collection vehicles had in cab systems that enabled them to check who had paid for the service. Market research of other local authorities indicated a 20% take up of the service.

Communities, leisure and culture

Savings 32, 32a, 32b, 32c – proposals for a redesigned library service

As part of their considerations of this item the Committee heard representations from the 'Save Streetly Library' campaign.

Members were concerned about the potential impact this saving could have on local communities. Members felt that proactive engagement work with local community groups should be taking place in order to develop alternative provision should local libraries have to close. The Library Service was highly valued by the local community. The future role of libraries was discussed. It was felt more could be done to modernise the service, such as increasing electronic book loans.

The Head of Leisure, Culture and Operations commented that engagement work with community groups regarding potential community take over's of

local libraries would not take place until it was formally proposed to close a particular facility. He also reported that there was an inaccuracy in the report and that the Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals had requested that the final sentence on page 64 paragraph 2.11 of the 'Rebalancing the budget' report be withdrawn.

Saving 36 – removal of the council's revenue subsidy to the New Art Gallery

As part of their considerations of this item the Committee heard representations from a Trustee of the New Art Gallery (NAG).

The Committee were concerned about the potential impact of the loss of funding to the NAG. Members felt that there were opportunities to work with the NAG and its supporters to preserve its future. It was noted that if the Council withdrew its grant then this could see the Arts Council choose to reduce their revenue support too. The NAG was a gallery of international standing and attracted a significant number of visitors to the area. Consideration could be given to charging for some exhibitions. A Member also suggested that consideration could be given to closing the NAG on a Sunday.

Members were concerned that no cost projections had been made regarding the storage costs of the Garman-Ryan Collection should the NAG close if the NAG was unable to meet the proposed budget savings.

The Leader responded by explaining that the proposal was not to close the NAG. Rather, it was to reduce the level of revenue funding from the Council, manage costs and attract additional income and sponsorship. Work was ongoing to attract potential sponsors and philanthropists.

Personnel and business support

Saving 53 – consider alternative funding for category 2 school crossing wardens

A Member commented that schools should consider how they can contribute to maintaining category 2 crossing wardens moving forward. It was noted that some schools had substantial reserves.

Regeneration

Saving 58 – reduction in highways maintenance resulting from the re-procurement of the highways maintenance contract

Saving 59 – additional reduction in highways maintenance

Members questioned whether the introduction of these savings would have a detrimental impact on the condition of roads in the borough and potentially increase insurance claims against the Council.

The Portfolio Holder reported that robust risk management would be in place to ensure the upkeep of the local road network. He commented that previous work with the Councils highways partner, Tarmac, had identified savings through innovative working rather than reductions in service.

Saving 60 – Increase cost of parking permits

It was confirmed that this was an increase for staff parking charges. The view was put forward that, if not already included, Members parking fees should also be increased.

Saving 61 – increase town centre off street parking charges

Members questioned whether an increase in parking charges would encourage motorists to use non-council car parks resulting in a drop in car parks income.

Saving 68 – Stop cleansing after markets/collecting and disposing of market traders waste

Members expressed concern that this proposed saving, combined with another to reduce street cleansing, could result in noticeable reduction in cleanliness in the town and district centres.

Saving 69 – Increase district centre market fees

A Member sought confirmation, which was provided, that the proposed increase in fees would apply to Willenhall market.

Social Care

Saving 76 – reduction in grant to the citizens advice bureau

It was noted that the Citizens Advice Bureau received grant funding from more than one Council department. Members noted the outline future commissioning model of increasing provision of online help and advice.

The Chair thanked the portfolio holders for attending the meeting and presenting their savings proposals.

Resolved:

- 1) Cabinet explore opportunities to work with local residents to establish community libraries;**

2) The budget savings 2016/17 – 2019/20 be noted.

144/15 Areas of focus 2015/16

Resolved:

That the item be deferred to the next meeting.

145/15 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be 3 January 2017.

Termination of Meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 8.35 pm.

Signed:

Date: