

MINUTES of the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 January 2012 at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors Robert Gledhill (Chair), Wendy Curtis, Shane Hebb (Substituting for Diane Revell), Danny Nicklen and Yash Gupta.

Apologies: Councillor Diane Revell
Councillor Garry Hague (as Vice Chair of Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny)

In attendance: Cllr Tom Kelly – Substituting for Vice-Chair of the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Wendy Herd – Chair of Health and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee
M. Hone – Director of Finance and Corporate Governance
S. Cox – Assistant Chief Executive
S. Clark – Head of Finance
J. Olsson – Director of People Services
S. Green – Strategic Leader: Early Years, Families and Communities
A. Millard – Head of Planning, Transport and Regeneration
L. Magill – Head of Public Protection
A. Murphy – Head of Environment
L. Billingham – Head of Adult Services
M. Boulter – Principal Democratic Services Officer

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a) Interests

No interests were declared.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6 January 2012 were approved as a correct record.

3. BUDGET 2012/13 – CROSS CUTTING ISSUES

The Committee received an update on each of the four working groups established at the 6th January meeting:

- Development Corporation Issues
Three issues had been identified by the groups so far, those being issues of integration, new projects the Council would undertake due to the integration and the resources required for these projects and the Regeneration Strategy. It was stated that the Development Corporation currently had eighty outstanding applications and these were being worked on to resolve.
- Climate Change Levy
This working group had yet to meet.
- The Vertex and Transformation Programme Savings
The Committee was informed that the final detail of the savings in this area would not be confirmed until after the budget setting process but officers confirmed that there was a £1.9 million contingency budget should the savings fail to reach target. Officers agreed that Cabinet would be made aware of this potential risk, although current savings proposals were on target.
- Potential Community, Leisure and Library Services (excluding impulse Leisure)
After an initial meeting, the library service had been removed from the working group as work was already being undertaken on this issue. There was an agreement by Members on the group that the focus would be on leisure services. Officers agreed that no work on the Thameside Complex would take place without being agreed through the Strategic Property Board (except health and safety work) and this would be a caveat in the Cabinet report concerning the budget.

4. FEES AND CHARGES

The Committee was informed that officers had been tasked with generating an extra £100,000 through fees and charges this year. All fees and charges had been agreed in consultation with portfolio holders and would be presented to Cabinet on 22nd February. There had been some anomalies in previous years' figures and the Leader had used emergency powers to correct these.

The Committee felt they could not comment on the figures as they did not know what impact they would have on residents and were unsure how they compared to neighbouring authorities. It was felt that relevant equality impacts assessments (EIA) were required and comparisons would have been helpful to look at when considering

certain figures that affected childcare or those charges that had increased significantly.

Through debate the Committee learnt that EIAs and comparisons with other councils had taken place and the officers in attendance could answer specific questions if the committee wished. It was expressed that they needed to be public if the Council were to be seen to be transparent

The Committee explored the Council's assumption that the same level of usage for services, despite increases, would remain the same. Officers explained that there was no data to suggest a decrease in usage and the fee increases had been based on informed decisions about the demand and affordability of services. For example, officers based the fees and charges at Grangewaters on a competitive rate with other local and neighbouring leisure centres. Similarly, the increase in the Santa in the Woods event was based on the high demand and therefore commercial viability of this service. Officers assured Members that they were aware of what Thurrock residents could reasonably afford and support services were in place for those families unable to afford important or essential services such as childcare.

It was noted that some fees and charges made significant income for the Council whereas others did not and Members noted that certain services, such as birth certificates, had risen significantly but their price still remained competitive and were not a regular cost for individual residents. Officers agreed that next year's report would contain the revenue totals for each department.

Members agreed that they were not able to recommend the fees and charges because they were not able to analyse the impact of the charges on residents.

RESOLVED that:

- i) The Committee reconvene before 22nd February Cabinet to receive an updated fees and charges report containing comparisons and EIA.**
- ii) If possible, other overview and scrutiny committees receive their fees and charges at any meetings before 22nd February.**

5. URGENT ITEM

The Chair raised an issue relating to monitoring the decision making process and maintaining corporate memory and ensuring decisions of the past were easily accessible and accountable.

RESOLVED that an item be added to the next Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

The meeting was suspended at 8.02pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Matthew Boulter, telephone (01375) 652082,
or alternatively e-mail mboulter@thurrock.gov.uk**