

MINUTES of the meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on ~~19 January~~ 16 February 2012 at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors Robert Gledhill (Chair), Wendy Curtis, ~~Shane Hebb~~ imon Wootton (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)~~

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 FEES AND CHARGES

The Chair commented that there were over two hundred equality impacts assessments (EIAs) related to the fees and charges and due to the number the committee had received they felt they could not make a full and robust response.

With regards to Grangewaters committee members felt activity prices should not be increased at the level presented as it placed an extra burden on young families when providing activities for their children. It was also noted that competitors close to the centre were providing some activities at a cheaper rate. Officers explained that the revenue for Grangewaters had decreased in the last year and the increase of prices was an attempt to recover that revenue. Members stated that it was hard for small groups to use Grangewaters and residents were discouraged if they were not part of a bigger group. All Members agreed that the way Grangewaters was marketed needed to be improved.

There was a brief discussion on increases in play services and again Members felt this was an added burden on a vital service.

Members commented that school meal prices for this year could be included in the report although they recognised new prices would not be set until the new school year in September.

The Committee discussed the penalties for fly posting and felt that these could be increased significantly. Officers highlighted that the number of fines issued over a year would not create a significant income for the Council. Members felt more enforcement could be introduced to increase funds but also discourage this activity.

The Chair summarised the debate and added that fees and charges needed to be advertised more, especially activity and child care services, so that people were informed of the costs. The Committee also felt it important for the Council to publicise when it had not raised fees for a significant period so that if they were raised in the future, the Council could evidence that it had not raised prices for some time.

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.

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) 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.

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) From the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny point of view, the fees relating to play services and Grangewaters cannot be agreed.~~
- ~~ii) The Committee reconvene before 22nd February Cabinet to receive an updated fees and charges report. Fines for fly posting, graffiti and littering be increased.~~
- ~~iii) Fees and charges be advertised more widely. If possible, other overview and scrutiny committees receive their fees and charges at any meetings before 22nd February.~~

URGENT ITEM

~~The Chair raised an issue relating to 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 ended suspended at 7.508.02pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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or alternatively e-mail mboulter@thurrock.gov.uk**

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