

STRATEGY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9 April 2013
6.00pm - 8.40 pm

Present: Councillors Brown (Chair), Rosenstiel (Vice-Chair), Brierley, O'Reilly, Boyce, Benstead and Herbert

Leader of the Council – Councillor Bick

Executive Councillor for Customer Services & Resources – Councillor Smith

Officers Present

Chief Executive – Antoinette Jackson

Director of Customer and Community Services – Liz Bisset

Director of Environment – Simon Payne

Director of Resources – David Horspool

Head of Housing Strategy – Alan Carter

Head of Revenues and Benefits – Alison Cole

Strategy and Partnerships Manager – David Kidston

Committee Manager – Martin Whelan

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

13/23/SR Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Ashton, Councillor Bird attended as the alternate member.

13/24/SR Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

13/25/SR Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meetings held on 21st January 2013 and 15th February 2013 were approved and signed as a correct record.

13/26/SR Public Questions

There were no public questions.

13/27/SR Irrecoverable Debts to be written off

The committee noted the decision.

Councillor Herbert sought clarification from the Executive Councillor for Customer Services and Resources and officers regarding the process whether some of the decisions on write-offs would normally have taken place at a later date. The Head of Revenues and Benefits confirmed that whilst some of the debts were relatively recently accrued there was no realistic prospect of recovery in all instances. The Executive Councillor echoed the comments from the Head of Revenues and Benefits and explained that whilst it was not ideal for the decision to have been taken out of cycle, the circumstances had necessitated it happening on this occasion.

13/28/SR Options for the Debit & Credit Card Contract (Merchant Acquirer)

Matter for Decision: To consider the options for the Debit & Credit Card Contract (Merchant Acquirer).

Decision of the Executive Councillor for Customer Services and Resources:

The Executive Councillor resolved to:

- i. Approve an extension of the current contract for a period of six months, within existing terms to enable the Council to review and evaluate the tariffs, terms and conditions under a new Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) framework contract for Banking Services, to be available from April 2013.

Reasons for the Decision: As set out in the officer's report

Any alternative options considered and rejected: As set out in the officer's report

Scrutiny Considerations:

Not applicable – not requested for pre-scrutiny

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted):

Not applicable.

13/29/SR Customer Services and Resources Portfolio Plan 2013/14

Matter for Decision: To consider the Customer Services and Resources Portfolio Plan for 2013/14.

Decision of the Executive Councillor for Customer Services and Resources:

The Executive Councillor resolved to:

- i. Approve the Customer Services and Resources Portfolio Plan for 2013/14 subject to the following amendments
 - Addition of a performance measure for 2.5 to be agreed by the Executive Councillor in consultation with the Chair and Opposition Spokesperson.
 - Addition of Head of Tourism and City Centre Management (Emma Thornton) as the lead officer for 2.7.

Reasons for the Decision: As set out in the officer's report

Any alternative options considered and rejected: As set out in the officer's report

Scrutiny Considerations:

The Executive Councillor for Customer Services and Resources introduced the Portfolio Plan for 2013/14.

The committee made the following comments on the report

- i. Regarding objective 2.4 it was questioned whether this extended to providing additional hardware, rather than relying on officers using their own hardware to work at home. The Director of Resources explained that when homeworking was originally rolled out, officers had expressed a view that they did not want any additional hardware. In response to a further question, the Director of Resources confirmed that this process had occurred some time ago and was currently under review.
- ii. The Director of Resources was asked whether objective 2.4 extended to providing wireless connectivity in community centres and similar buildings. The committee were advised that wireless connectivity needed to be considered carefully due to the cost and security implications.
- iii. The potential for conflict between the objectives 2.1 and 2.5 was questioned. It was also questioned why 2.5 did not have a performance measure. Concern was noted and it was agreed to approve a form of wording for the performance measure outside of the meeting following consultation with the Chair and Spokes.
- iv. The lack of a lead officer for 2.7 was questioned. Following discussion it was agreed that the Head of Tourism and City Centre Management (Emma Thornton) should be the lead officer for that objective.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the recommendation and endorsed it by 4 votes to 0 subject to

- Addition of a performance measure for 2.5 to be agreed by the Executive Councillor in consultation with the Chair and Opposition Spokesperson.
- Addition of Head of Tourism and City Centre Management (Emma Thornton) as the lead officer for 2.7.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted):

Not applicable.

13/30/SR Clay Farm Land Disposal

Matter for Decision: To consider the disposal of land at Clay Farm.

Decision of the Executive Councillor for Customer Services and Resources:

The Executive Councillor resolved to:

- i. Confirm the award of a contract to a developer partner selected through a procurement process to develop the City Council's land at Clay Farm

Reasons for the Decision: As set out in the officer's report

Any alternative options considered and rejected: As set out in the officer's report

Scrutiny Considerations:

The committee resolved to exclude the press and public by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 during the consideration of appendix 2.

The committee made no comments on the public element of the report. The committee debated the appendix in closed session.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the recommendation and endorsed it by 4 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted):

Not applicable.

13/31/SR Discretionary Housing Payment report

Matter for Decision: To consider discretionary housing payments.

Decision of the Executive Councillor for Customer Services and Resources:

The Executive Councillor resolved to:

- ii. Agree an approach to the award of Discretionary Housing Payments that maintains discretion, as set out in the Discretionary Housing Payment procedural which is appended to the committee report and the budget as set out in the committee report.
- iii. Ask Officers to report not later than October 2013 on the operation of the scheme including if there is a need to supplement the budget for the fund.

Reasons for the Decision: As set out in the officer's report

Any alternative options considered and rejected: As set out in the officer's report

Scrutiny Considerations:

The committee received a report regarding Discretionary Housing Payments presented by the Director of Customer and Community Services and the Head of Revenues and Benefits.

The committee made the following comments on the report

- i. Clarification was requested on the arrangements for time limiting of awards, particularly where no outcome was imminent. The concern was acknowledged, but it was explained that where awards were not short-term, payments were limited to the end of the financial year due to the cash limit on the fund and the fact that the increased funding was designed to facilitate the transition of welfare reform changes.

- ii. It was suggested that the criteria on page 10 of the officer's report should also include partners who are unable to share a bedroom due to reasons of disability. It was explained that whilst this would be considered as part of a request for discretionary housing payment, each case must be considered on its own merits.
- iii. The adequacy of the funding was questioned and it was suggested that funding should be increased. With regards to this point, the following points were made
 - a. The extent of take up of the fund was currently unknown as it was a new fund.
 - b. The City Council did not have the legal power to spend more than £455,000 per year in this fund.
 - c. Members were assured that if the spend trajectory raised concerns regarding the adequacy of the fund; the issue would be escalated promptly as there is continuous monitoring of the scheme.

Following discussion it was agreed to amend the recommendations to read

- i. To agree an approach to the award of Discretionary Housing Payments that maintains discretion, as set out in the Discretionary Housing Payment procedural document which is appended to this report and the budget as set out in the officers report.
 - ii. To ask Officers to report not later than October 2013 on the operation of the scheme including if there is a need to supplement the funding within the overall maximum allowed.
- iv. In response to a question the Head of Revenues and Benefits explained which types of properties were covered by the scheme, and arrangements in place to support people.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the recommendations (as amended in point .iii) and endorsed them unanimously.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations as amended.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted):

Not applicable.

13/32/SR Strategy Portfolio Plan 2013/14

Matter for Decision: To consider the Strategy Portfolio Plan 2013/14

Decision of the Leader of the Council:

The Leader resolved to:

- iv. Approve the Strategy Portfolio Plan for 2013/14.

Reasons for the Decision: As set out in the officer's report

Any alternative options considered and rejected: As set out in the officer's report

Scrutiny Considerations:

The Leader of the Council introduced the Strategy Portfolio Plan and outlined the key elements of the plan.

The committee made the following comments on the plan.

- i. With regards to Neighbourhood Resolution Panels the Leader was asked for an update on progress. The Leader responded that the project approved at the beginning of the 2012/13 financial year was a two year project, but had been staffed intermittently in that period and in practice was only six months into operation. The committee were advised that the first referrals were due in the summer, and that the majority of work to date had been focussed on ensuring that the appropriate protocols were in place with the Police and other partners. It was highlighted that it was planned to carry forward the funding for an additional period of time in lieu of the period in which the project had not been staffed.

- ii. The Leader was asked what barriers existed to progress with the City Deal, and whether these related to governance. The Leader explained that it was important to ensure that the governance arrangements were fair and equitable, and that negotiations were on-going with central government. The Leader explained that the proposals were well placed to succeed.
- iii. With regards to objective 1.2 the Leader was asked for clarification regarding the engagement target. The Leader acknowledged that the engagement activity was already at a very high level and would be more appropriately phrased as an outcome based target.
- iv. The Leader was asked why there was no reference to engagement with the Police and Crime Commissioner in the plan. The Leader advised that it was strongly implied in objective 1.4.
- v. The Leader was asked for more information on objective 1.1 and whether more information was available. The committee were informed that the ownership of the target sat with the Community Safety Partnership of which the City Council was one partner organisation.
- vi. In a response to a question regarding objective 3.1 the Leader confirmed that the City Council were exploring a range of options to increase and maximise income.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the recommendation and endorsed it by 4 votes to 0.

The Leader approved the recommendation.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Leader (and any Dispensations Granted):

Not applicable.

13/33/SR Safer City Grant Scheme 2012/13: Report on Operation

The committee noted that the report had been withdrawn.

13/34/SR Annual Review of the Council's Single Equality Scheme (2012 to 2015)

Matter for Decision: To consider the Annual Review of the Council's Single Equality Scheme (2012 to 2015).

Decision of the Leader

The Leader resolved to:

- v. Note the progress and achievements during the first year of the City Council's Single Equality Scheme.
- vi. Approve the actions for the second year of the City Council's Single Equality Scheme.

Reasons for the Decision: As set out in the officer's report

Any alternative options considered and rejected: As set out in the officer's report

Scrutiny Considerations:

The committee received a report regarding the Annual Review of the Council's Single Equality Scheme (2012-2015) presented by the Strategy and Partnerships Manager.

The committee made the following comments on the report

- i. The Leader was asked to comment on the quality and robustness of the existing equalities impact assessment (EQIA) process. The Leader explained that the process was under constant evolution and responded to challenges as they arose.
- ii. The Leader was questioned on how the Council was proposing to respond to the census results, which indicated a significant increase in the BME and non-white British communities in Cambridge. The suggestion of reviewing the employment targets was welcomed. The Leader welcomed the comments and agreed that the Council would need to review a wide range of issues as more detailed information becomes available through the census process.

- iii. Clarification was requested on the reference to 2011 on page 108 of the committee report, and whether it should actually refer to 2001. The error was noted.
- iv. Concern was expressed that white minority ethnic groups could be “hidden” in certain statistical approaches.
- v. Support was expressed for the suggestion in the Leaders introduction that training should be provided to Councillors on mental health issues.
- vi. Concern was expressed that engagement with the limited number of references to traveller communities in the report. It was suggested that members of the community may be resistant to identifying themselves as such due to the risk of discrimination. The committee were advised that Cambridge was an important Romany location, as Midsummers Fair was one of major gathering points for the community during the year. The Strategy and Partnerships Manager welcomed the comments and outlined the range of engagement undertaken across the Council by officer, and agreed that information in the plan could be expanded.
- vii. Greater engagement was requested with South Cambridgeshire District Council on gypsy and traveller issues. The Head of Strategic Housing explained that there was already extensive engagement, and that it was hoped to identify suitable sites through the local plan processes in each authority.
- viii. The committee also noted the significant engagement undertaken by the City Council with the traveller community in preparation for the Holocaust Memorial Day.
- ix. The difficulties in identifying potentially obscured issues in the EQIA process were highlighted. A specific issue with a recent assessment prepared for the Public Toilet Working Party which had not considered any issues regarding gender re-assignment was highlighted. The Strategy and Partnerships Manager acknowledged the concern, and explained the approach taken in the preparation of assessments. The committee were assured that officers were encouraged to seek advice where appropriate in preparing assessments.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the recommendation and endorsed it by 4 votes to 0.

The Leader approved the recommendation.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Leader (and any Dispensations Granted):

Not applicable.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm

CHAIR