

Community Safety, Environment and Residents Services Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes

Monday 18 January 2016

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Larry Culhane (Chair), Iain Cassidy, Sharon Holder, Charlie Dewhurst and Steve Hamilton

Other Councillors: Sue Fennimore, Wesley Harcourt, Max Schmid and Ben Coleman

Officers: Sue Harris, Hitesh Jolapara, Mark Jones, Andrew Lord, Kathy May and David Page

29. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2015 be approved as a correct record, subject to the amendment of the title of Minute 24 from 'Boroughwide 20MPH Speed Limit – Consultation Results' to '20 MPH – Consultation Results'.

30. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence from Councillors. George Warren, Flood Risk Manager, had been taken ill and so item 5, Update on Sustainable Drainage Solutions, had been deferred until the PAC meeting on 2nd March 2016.

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

32. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Chair invited members of the public present to make any comments in relation to issues on the agenda as part of that item.

33. UPDATE ON SUSTAINABLE DRAINAGE SCHEMES

This item was deferred to the meeting on 2nd March 2016 owing to officer illness.

34. WORMHOLT PARK LANDSCAPE REFURBISHMENT PROJECT

Dave Page, Director for Safer Neighbourhoods, explained that the park was in the middle of a 22 week improvement project. Works had begun at the eastern end of the park, near to the Bloom development. The remains of the former Janet Adegoke Centre and the bowling green had been removed, although this had been more difficult than anticipated. The planting had been thinned, and the beds prepared for new planting. The next phase would be taking place in the south west corner of the park, with the Multi Use Games Area being installed, as well as footpath works. The play equipment would be delivered in the last week of January, and the project remained on budget. There were issues with the concrete slab above the Bloom underground car park, which extended into the park by 1.2 metres and made planting above it at ground level impossible. It was proposed to extend the existing paved area and install a soak away drainage system, subject to an acceptable estimate being received. Sport England had declined funding for replacement tennis courts, and so, at this time, these would not be built, although officers continued to seek other funding for them.

The project had been consulted on at length with residents and the Friends of Wormholt Park, a dragon had been designed by pupils at Wormholt School and would be sculpted by a local artist, whilst a wheelchair swing had been match funded by residents, and would therefore be installed as part of the works. The committee expressed its thanks to Hayley Wedgebury for having organised the campaign for a wheelchair swing, and to the London Housing Partnership for contributing to the cost of the sculpture. The park had remained open throughout the works but it was likely that the park would be re-launched as part of the W12 Festival, once new grass had become established.

The Chair asked whether the Bloom development would pay for additional costs resulting from the car park slab. Dave Page explained that officers were looking into liability, however, he was also keen to ensure that the works were done as part of the wider scheme and so this had not been officers' first priority.

The Chair asked whether there had been any problems with misuse of the wheelchair swing in Ravenscourt Park, and whether officers expected such issues in Wormholt Park. Dave Page said that there had been no issues with the existing swing in Ravenscourt Park, and that it had been both well used and respected; he did not see why there would be any problems related to the

swing at Wormholt Park. Members agreed that a letter be sent to Ms Wedgebury to thank her for her efforts in getting the swing built.

35. FUTURE WASTE AND STREET CLEANSING SERVICES – INVOLVING THE CITIZEN – CONSULTATION OUTCOMES

Kathy May, Head of Waste and Street Enforcement, explained that the consultation on Waste and Street Cleaning had been proposed to the meeting of the PAC on 21 September 2015. The consultation had closed early due to misleading publicity but answers received at that point had been collated, together with suggestions on how the service could be improved. An action plan had been developed from these suggestions and officers were working to implement this plan, whilst the responses to the consultation were included in the agenda pack for Members' consideration. Kathy May invited questions and comments.

A resident asked what the Council was doing to reduce the amount of fly-tipping. Kathy May explained that there were some changes in the action plan aimed at reducing fly-tipping, but noted that other local authorities across London were also facing an increase in dumped rubbish. The resident suggested that the Council could use its resources more effectively and suggested:

- Reporting of fly-tips by the crews of refuse lorries and by street sweepers.
- Fly-tip collection vans following refuse lorries.
- PCSOs reporting fly-tips.
- Routine inspections by Councillors and residents.
- The Council providing larger bins for storing waste.
- Better communication between Council departments such as Public Health, Environment and Housing.
- A focus on clearing waste rather than investigating where it had come from.
- Increased enforcement against fly-posters.

Kathy May explained that crews were already supposed to report dumped waste, although she didn't have figures at the meeting on how many reports were made. She noted that there were not sufficient vans to follow all of the refuse lorries, and that PCSOs had a number of other priorities. Councillors explained that in some areas the larger style bins, with a flip over lid, appeared to work well and that encouragement should be offered to increase their use in appropriate areas. Sue Harris apologised for issues around communication between departments, which she understood were now resolved. Kathy May noted that clearing waste without investigating it would mean that those dumping it were more likely to get away with it, and a 'clear all' policy would likely cost a significant amount. Councillor Harcourt asked that fly-posting be reported in order that it could be investigated, but noted that some advertisements, such as estate agents boards, were harder to control because of legal issues. He also asked that reporting options for frontline staff be looked into.

A resident said that he felt that waste dumped at hotspots ought to be investigated, but that otherwise investigation was a poor use of resources. Another resident said that there had been no successful prosecutions in his area for fly-tipping and felt that investigations needed to lead to prosecutions to be worthwhile. Kathy May explained that lots of investigation took place, but that it was difficult to gather sufficient evidence to prosecute. The Chair asked how many officers worked on enforcement, and how many collected the dumped waste. Kathy May explained that there were 8 enforcement officers, who spent approximately 75% of their time investigating dumped rubbish. She did not know how many contractor staff collected fly-tipped waste, but agreed to provide this figure to the Chair. Councillor Harcourt explained that intensive work had been taking place at Lakeside Road which had been a hotspot for dumping. CCTV had been installed, together with signs warning those tempted to fly-tip of the number of successful prosecutions on the road.

Councillor Coleman asked how fly-tip crews decided what to collect. Kathy May explained that crews were sent to collect a particular item or fly-tip, but that they then had discretion to collect other items; there was however a limit to the capacity of their van. Kathy May also explained that some items which were under investigation by enforcement officers could not be collected until officers had gathered evidence.

Councillor Fennimore explained that she had suggested the stickers from residents referred to in the action plan, and asked how this scheme would be publicised. Kathy May explained that they were being trialled in Lakeside Road, and if successful they would then be extended to other areas, probably based on demand. Councillor Fennimore asked that they be rolled out to several more streets now.

A resident asked how much progress had been made on Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) being charged a levy for waste collection. Kathy May explained that the idea was being pursued, but that it would take some time. Sue Harris explained that officers from authorities across London were looking into the issue and a report was due in six months' time.

A resident highlighted the issue of abandoned bicycles not being collected. He said that there were six bikes at the front of Hammersmith Town Hall which had been there for well over a year, despite his reporting them as abandoned. Sue Harris apologised that these had not been dealt with. The Chair suggested that abandoned bicycles could be identified as part of the audit of cycle racks being carried out by the Borough's cycling officer, Richard Duffill.

A resident asked how good the Council's reporting systems were, as he had found that not all reports were dealt with appropriately. Kathy May explained that the 'Report It' app had been audited recently and the flow of reports through the system had been good. Councillor Harcourt said that he regularly reported issues using the app and the website which were then resolved by officers.

Councillor Dewhirst noted that the Council had shifted its focus from littering to fly-tipping and asked whether this was effective. Councillor Harcourt explained that he had decided to concentrate on rubbish dumping as the amount of littering had reduced, whilst rubbish dumping had become a greater problem.

The Chair asked whether a leaflet explaining waste arrangements to residents of Houses of Multiple Occupancy had been produced. Kathy May explained that these leaflets would be distributed in areas with a high density of HMOs by the end of the month. New leaflets to be sent with Council tax bills would also be produced, with one specifically for new residents and one for existing residents. The Council Tax bills would not, however, include details of the collection day as this would be complex and the I.T. systems were not capable of identifying this information. The Council planned to install better signage in streets to tell residents of their collection days.

A resident asked where information on what could be recycled was available. Kathy May explained that bags and signs had to be kept simple, but said that there was more information on the website. The resident felt that more information could be on the website.

A resident asked what was done about waste dumped by businesses. Sue Harris explained that businesses were being written to, reminding them of their responsibilities. Night time enforcement officers were being recruited and would be taking action against businesses which were dumping waste. Councillors and residents could report waste dumped by businesses, and it was likely that any waste outside businesses not in a marked bag would be dumped. The Chair asked whether, when writing to businesses about their waste arrangements, officers informed them that the Council offered a waste collection service. Kathy May said that the Council did inform businesses that it offered the service, but referred to the right of businesses to go with other licenced waste carriers as this is what is stated in legislation.

A resident asked whether issuing Fixed Penalty Notices for littering was self-funding. Sue Harris explained that the current model was not self-funding, however, officers were exploring alternative options which may be. The main difficulty was that collecting unpaid fines was not self-funding owing to high legal costs and low income.

Councillor Hamilton asked what dates the consultation had run. Sue Harris explained that the consultation had finished slightly early owing to misleading publicity being distributed by some local groups, which was likely to influence the results of the survey. Councillor Harcourt agreed to send the dates the consultation had run to Councillor Hamilton.

The Chair thanked residents for contributing to a lively and interesting debate.

36. 2016 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Hitesh Jolapara introduced the Corporate Budget. He explained that the squeeze on public sector finances continued in the Government's attempt to

reduce the deficit. Local Government funding had reduced significantly, by about 20% since 2010, as other areas such as Policing, the NHS and Education were protected from funding cuts. He explained that the Government now allowed Councils to introduce a 2% Social Care Precept, however, the amount this might raise in Hammersmith and Fulham was low as existing levels of Council Tax were low. Proposals for the devolution of Non Domestic Rates was expected, but new responsibilities were expected to come with this extra money; no detail was yet available from the Government. Mr Jolapara explained that there were two large items of corporate growth, resulting from reform of Local Government Pensions to remove the National Insurance rebate, and from increased costs in Children's Services owing to new legislation and reduced funding. The administration was proposing that Council Tax be frozen, and that the Social Care Precept not be applied in Hammersmith and Fulham. Fees and charges for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Adult Learning and Skills, Libraries and Housing would be frozen. Parking Charges would also be frozen, whilst some fees in Environmental Services would rise by inflation (1.1%). Commercial fees and charges would be reviewed on a case by case basis, to ensure that services were both maximising income and remaining competitive. The budget would not draw upon general fund reserves, although 20% of the £90 million earmarked reserves were committed for 2016/17. Mr Jolapara explained that looking forward the Council would face an increasing budget gap, which if the Council did nothing, would rise to £55.8 million in 2019/20.

Mark Jones introduced the Environmental Services Budget. He explained that Environmental Services brought in a significant amount of income and that this was used to provide the wide range of universal services it delivered. There were some large contracts in the service, covering waste, street cleaning, facilities management, grounds maintenance and enhanced policing. The service had tried to protect front-line services through increased commercialisation and further efficiencies. Part of the variance in parking income had also been included in the 2016/17 budget which had helped to reduce the level of savings needed. There were a few small items of growth relating to: anticipated licensing fee increases not taking place; the delayed implementation of the Wi-Fi concession leading to income being delayed, and; additional spending on improving access to sports facilities for residents. There was likely to be budget growth in 2017/18 of about £500,000 owing to increasing waste disposal costs.

Mark Jones highlighted the key risks to the service budget, which were a fall in parking revenue, additional facilities management costs and a failure to meet income targets, especially in Adult Learning and Skills and Commercial Services. Fees and charges would rise by a maximum of 1.1%, the rate of inflation, with parking and a range of other charges frozen. The Bulky Waste Collection charge would drop by a further 2.2% to encourage residents to use it, whilst some registrars charges were being cut to make them more competitive.

Councillor Hamilton referred to paragraph 3.4 of the report and asked why the business rates tax base would not be confirmed until February. Andrew Lord explained that this was because of a number of pending appeals, and

because the impact of an expanded Westfield shopping centre had not yet been modelled.

Councillor Hamilton asked why the budget was not presented using the zero based methodology. Councillor Schmid explained that the Council was adopting a zero based approach to find savings, but that the budget would continue to be presented in the usual way.

Councillor Hamilton asked why the Wi-Fi project had been delayed. Mark Jones explained that the concession had been given to a private company which had been slow to implement its service. The service had now launched in town centres.

Councillor Hamilton asked whether it was prudent to include the positive parking variance in the 2016/17 budget. Mark Jones explained that less than half of the existing variance had been included in the budget for 2016/17. Councillor Hamilton sought assurances that this change would not motivate officers to fine residents more readily than they would otherwise have done, especially for moving vehicle offences. The Chair explained that officers were not set targets around how many residents to fine, whilst Councillor Schmid noted that the proposals allowed for more than half of the existing variance to not be collected without impacting on the budget. Councillor Harcourt explained that no new cameras had been introduced, and that the administration were trying to deal with a number of issues with signage that the previous administration had introduced. Changes were being delayed by the Information Commissioner's Office and the new signage guidance from the Department for Transport.

The Chair asked what approach other councils had taken to setting their Council Tax. Mark Jones said that there were other London Boroughs which were seeking to increase Council Tax.

Councillor Dewhirst referred to paragraph 7.7 of the report and asked how spending money on installing new LED lighting would reduce costs. Mark Jones explained that whilst capital would be invested the Council would benefit from lower electricity charges as LEDs were more efficient than existing luminaries whilst repair costs would also fall due to the equipment being newer and more reliable.

Councillor Dewhirst asked whether there would be any changes to the opening times or maintenance of parks. Councillor Schmid confirmed that no savings which would impact on front line services were proposed in this area.

A resident asked whether the roll out of pay by phone was a good opportunity to raise parking charges. Councillor Schmid explained that increasing parking charges was likely to have an impact on businesses and so was not supported by the administration. Increasing charges also pushed people to look at alternative parking options which might lead to reduced revenue.

Councillor Hamilton asked whether the budget proposal for increased income generation through offering new Adult Learning and Skills classes, which had

been classified as being part of the Housing Options, Skills and Economic Development Service was the same as the risk identified in paragraph 4.11 of the report. Mark Jones confirmed that this was and apologised if the report was unclear on this point.

Councillor Hamilton asked whether the proposed sponsorship of assets target of £10,000 was unambitious. Councillor Schmid felt that it was realistic, as this was a new scheme; it would be imprudent to include a larger amount without evidence of the scheme's ability to raise it.

Councillor Hamilton queried how the £42,000 extra income from filming, hall lettings and events would be raised and where additional market stalls would be accommodated . Mark Jones explained that better marketing was expected to increase filming, hall lettings and events income significantly whilst additional markets at North End Road, and changes to the operation of the market at Lyric Square were also expected to raise additional income. Councillor Hamilton asked whether the increase in the hall fee supplements were accurate, as if the hall fees were increasing, 15% of the fee would also be higher. Councillor Schmid noted that as there was no proposed increase in the supplement percentage this fee did not need to be listed in the exceptional fees and charges, felling that its inclusion made the document less clear.

Councillor Hamilton queried the inclusion of a growth item on Waste Disposal of £0 and the interchangeable use of the words competitive and reasonable. Mark Jones explained that the growth item of £0 had been included to highlight that for the first year in a very long time there was no growth for Waste Disposal. He explained that the fees and charges justifications, where the inconsistent wording appeared, were written by service managers and so the different wording was simply the result of different choices being made by them rather than anything more fundamental.

Councillor Hamilton said that he had not received a notification to say that the delayed budget papers had been published. The Clerk agreed to look into this, whilst Councillor Schmid apologised that the papers were not available for the original agenda despatch owing to the late receipt of information from the Government.

37. WORK PROGRAMMING

The proposed work programme was noted.

38. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Members noted that the next meeting was scheduled for 2nd March 2016.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.05 pm

Chairman

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