

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

Monday 30 January 2017

PRESENT

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

Other Councillors: Wesley Harcourt and Max Schmid

25. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Sharon Holder.

26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

27. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

28. 2017 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS)

Hitesh Jolapara, Strategic Finance Director, presented the Council's budget. He explained that economists were forecasting that the economy would grow less strongly than previously thought. It was predicted that public sector finances would be in a less healthy position than suggested by past forecasts. Government borrowing had already exceeded targets and whilst public sector

spending had risen slightly, funding for Local Government in London had fallen significantly.

Hammersmith and Fulham faced growth of £7.3m, including unfunded growth from government, as well as inflation of £2.8m. Government grant funding would also fall by 20%. These pressures would be balanced by savings of £14.4m, and a balanced budget of £154.5m was proposed. The administration was not proposing to either increase council tax, or apply the Social Care Precept. Developer contributions of £2 million would again be used to fund services. The general reserve was expected to continue to be £19m, whilst 20% of the earmarked reserves would be used to fund invest to save and similar projects.

Hitesh Jolapara concluded his presentation by noting that if the council did not bring in more revenue or develop more efficient ways of delivering services the gap between resources and expenditure was likely to grow significantly.

Mark Jones, Director of Finance and Resources – Environment, explained that the majority of the Environment department's expenditure was covered by income from fees and charges. Approximately £70 million was spent per year, with £63 million revenue being brought in. The department also had a number of high value contracts for service delivery.

For 2017/18 the department aimed to bring in significant amounts of extra income through increased commercialisation. It was also expected that more money would be allocated by Public Health to supporting the department's work. There would also be modest savings in some areas. Combined the additional income and savings would lead to a total saving of £2.7 million.

There were also funds being held centrally for possible growth in the department, covering; additional costs of alternative methods of weed-killing; a slower implementation of the Phoenix Leisure Centre project; additional costs as a result of rent reviews of Council leased buildings, and; spending on defending planning decisions at Judicial Review.

The main risks to the departmental budget were an increased reliance on income, some of which could be affected by a downturn in the wider economy, and increasing costs of both staff and waste disposal.

Many Fees and Charges in the department were to be frozen, parking charges being amongst those which would not increase. The fees for trading at Lyric Square's Thursday market had fallen significantly since the market had returned to Council control. Some fees and charges were to be reviewed either to ensure that they were both competitive and covered the council's costs or in response to legal proceedings elsewhere. Other fees and charges in the department would rise by inflation at 1.8%.

The chair thanked officers for their presentation and invited questions.

Councillor Dewhirst asked whether there was an income strategy for moving traffic penalty charge notices (PCNs). Mark Jones explained that there was not. Councillor Max Schmid said that PCN income had dropped over the 2016/17 financial year and explained that the council had to accept that this income source was volatile.

Councillor Dewhirst asked what the planned changes to parking at Hurlingham Park would be. Councillor Harcourt explained that park users had complained about vehicles being parked in Hurlingham Park's car park for extended periods of time; it was thought that much of this anti-social parking related to a nearby business. The proposal was to introduce some form of paid parking to prevent this and keep spaces available for people using the park.

The Chair noted that Hammersmith and Fulham Council was proposing to freeze its council tax and asked how this compared to other councils. Hitesh Jolapara explained that whilst full data was not yet available as other councils had not yet announced their proposals, it was unlikely that any council would cut council tax, although some others might also manage to freeze it.

The Chair asked how successful the Smarter Budgetting programme had been. Mark Jones said that the programme had delivered a significant number of ideas for savings and increased income; he thought that it might have delivered slightly higher savings than previous approaches.

Councillor Hamilton noted that officers had predicted that with the introduction of pay by phone technology pay and display/pay by phone income would rise whilst parking fines would fall. He understood that income from fines had not fallen as far as had been expected and asked what the difference between income in 2015/16 and 2016/17 had been. He also asked what the relationship between paid parking income and fines was now expected to be. Mark Jones agreed to provide the figures requested outside of the meeting. He explained that officers were not yet sure if the predicted drop in fines would take place. Councillor Hamilton asked whether the cost of collecting money from pay and display machines had reduced. Mark Jones said that it had not yet, although a fall in the cost was anticipated. Councillor Hamilton asked whether charges using pay by phone parking services and pay and display machines were the same. Councillor Harcourt confirmed that they were the same.

Councillor Hamilton asked who bought CCTV services from Hammersmith and Fulham Council. Andy Stocker explained that these were bought by other local authorities and by housing associations.

Councillor Dewhirst asked whether the Lyric Square market now generated less revenue for the council. Mark Jones said that income was almost the same as when the operation of the market had been outsourced; the council did not now lose the money the contractor had taken in profits.

Councillor Hamilton asked what the proposed changes to street naming charges would mean for residents. Councillor Harcourt explained that these

changes to charges would affect developers; fees for residents wanting to rename their homes would not rise. Councillor Hamilton noted that the budget included income from a Flower Stall at Shepherds Bush Station; he asked whether the council would be employing a florist. Councillor Harcourt said that the council would let the pitch at the station, which had fallen into disuse, to a florist who could then run their business from it.

Councillor Hamilton asked whether the council's proposed diesel vehicle parking permit surcharge had been included in the budget. Mark Jones said that it hadn't been included in the budget.

Councillor Hamilton asked whether spending public health money on services in the department was reasonable. Mark Jones explained that the spending was on services where physicians felt that there were demonstrable health benefits. Councillor Schmid explained that the spending had to be agreed by the Director of Public Health.

29. STREET CLEANLINESS AND RECYCLING

Sue Harris introduced the report and explained that it was intended to update the committee on the work which had been done since the last report to the PAC. The administration had set up a number of review groups to look at how the service could be improved; these had made recommendations which had been taken up by Serco and the council. Serco had also reviewed their own performance and had developed an action plan. The next step was for Serco and the council to act on the findings, and whilst many recommendations had already started to be implemented there was more to do.

Sue Harris explained that the council had carried out a lot of work in a number of hotspot areas to try to tackle dumping there. These had used a significant amount of resources but had generally led to positive outcomes. As well as improvements in specific areas the overall level of fly tipping had fallen, and the recycling rate had improved slightly.

Councillor Harcourt explained that a lot of work had been done to improve the waste and recycling service. The council had pressed Serco improve and they had accepted that there were some things which they needed to do better. Councillor Harcourt said that the council had also made changes to how the service worked, for example the council had previously investigated even very small fly tips; now Serco would be asked to clear most tips unless they were especially large or they saw evidence which was likely to lead to a prosecution.

The Chair noted that a number of residents had provided information and ideas to the council and asked whether these had been used. Sue Harris explained that residents had provided the council with some really useful information which had helped officers and Serco to work better together.

The Chair asked whether landlords had been receptive to the council's advice about waste management and storage. Lesley Gates explained that it was often quite difficult to contact landlords but that where this was possible the

guidance was generally welcomed. She explained that the guidance was to be put onto the council's website so that it could easily be accessed.

Councillor Dewhirst asked what the council could do to deal with individual residents who persistently put out their bins on the wrong day. Sue Harris said that there was an enforcement hierarchy for residents identified as not presenting their waste correctly; to begin with officers would write to the resident and put up notices in the area; if that didn't work officers would look to issue a fixed penalty notice (FPN) although this required clear evidence. Councillor Harcourt explained that the administration was considering whether to raise the FPN value which might deter residents from dumping waste.

Councillor Hamilton asked whether investigation of fly tips was to be reduced. Sue Harris clarified that it would now be focussed on areas where there were particular problems rather than trying to investigate lots of smaller tips.

Councillor Hamilton asked what the role of a town keeper would be. Sue Harris explained that a town keeper would be a street sweeper who was given additional responsibilities to report issues on their patch; she clarified that they would not be given enforcement powers. A resident asked that the town keepers be made responsible for reporting abandoned bicycles; Sue Harris agreed that this was a good idea.

Councillor Cassidy asked whether there was a difference in how long it would take for a fly tip to be collected if it was on a council estate rather than on the street. Andy Stocker said that there might be a slight delay as the process from reporting to collection was slightly longer for dumps on estates, however, he had already begun work to resolve this issue.

Councillor Cassidy asked how effective CCTV cameras were at preventing fly tipping. Andy Stocker explained that they were very useful tools. Where cameras were used overtly they were a strong deterrent. Cameras were also useful in enforcement; so long as they were well positioned they could catch those dumping rubbish 'red-handed' which could lead to prosecution. A resident asked whether camera could also be used to enforce traffic regulations, referring to the one way section of Crisp Road. Andy Stocker explained that an additional camera would be installed on Crisp Road soon.

Councillor Hamilton asked whether the reduction in the number of night time enforcement officers to two meant that the service could not be delivered when one of them was on leave. Sue Harris explained that it was hoped that other officers could cover for periods of leave but agreed to look into whether an additional officer could be added to the team to make it more robust.

A resident complained that more needed to be done to deal with rubbish dumping in Avonmore. Sue Harris agreed that the area was quite complex and that there were lots of issues to tackle, although short term residents seemed to be causing most of the problems. Lesley Gates noted that officers were trying to deal with the Airbnb property which was causing many issues. The resident suggested that CCTV cameras and more litter bins were

needed. Officers agreed to attend the Avonmore Residents Association meeting in May 2017 to report on progress made in the area.

A number of residents said that they had reported issues to the council which had not been dealt with. Andy Stocker said that if this happened residents could contact him on streetczar@lbhf.gov.uk and he would look into the issue.

A resident said that he had previously suggested litter patrols be run to catch those dropping litter; he asked whether the council had investigated this possibility. Sue Harris explained that the council was waiting for a report from Brent on how successful their trial of the service had been.

A resident said that pigeon feeding was becoming a problem in the borough; he was aware of a few people who regularly fed large numbers of pigeons and felt that intervention was needed. He also felt that more signs telling people not to feed pigeons were needed.

A resident noted that the council has recently claimed that the streets were the cleanest they had ever been; he asked that the evidence for this be shared with him. Sue Harris agreed to give him this information outside of the meeting.

30. WORK PROGRAMME AND DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The committee's work programme was noted. Members noted that the next meeting would be held on 1 March 2017 in the Small Hall at Hammersmith Town Hall, starting at 7pm.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 8.25 pm

Chair

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