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# **GENERAL PUBLIC SERVICES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE**

## **DRAFT MINUTES**

of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth, on Thursday 7 December 2017 from 7.30pm to 9.42pm.

**Present:** Councillors Phil Brading (Lead Member, Public Services), Roger Seabourne (Lead Member, Community Safety), Rupert Barnes, Sara Bedford, Martin Brooks, Marilyn Butler, Valerie Coltman, Debbie Morris, Joy Mann and Andrew Scarth.

**Officers:** Steven Halls, Chief Executive  
Geof Muggeridge, Director of Community & Environmental Services  
Ray Figg, Head of Community Services  
Malcolm Clarke, Waste and Environment Manager  
Jennie Probert, Environmental Strategy Manager  
Andy Stovold, Head of Community Partnerships  
Mike Simpson, Committee & Web Officer

### **GPS 10/17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Phil Williams (Cllr Sara Bedford substituted) and Cllr Stephen Cox

### **GPS 11/17 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the General Public Services and Community Safety Committee meeting held on Thursday 29 June 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairmen.

### **GPS 12/17 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

### **GPS 13/17 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None received.

### **GPS 14/17 BUDGET MONITORING – PERIOD 6 (END OF SEPTEMBER)**

The Lead Member for Public Services presented the comprehensive period 6 (end of September) Budget Monitoring report for all the Council's committees.

The report had previously been presented to the Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 7 November and was for noting by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Budget Monitoring report be noted.

### **Councillor Phil Brading in the Chair**

#### **GPS 15/17 STRATEGIC, SERVICE AND FINANCIAL PLANNING 2018-21**

The Chairman introduced the report, which enabled the Committee to comment to the Policy and Resources Committee on the Strategic Plan, the Committee's service plans, and the growth bids to support them for the three years commencing 1 April 2018, and asked whether there were any questions.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the draft Strategic Plan attached as Appendix 1 be recommended to the Policy and Resources Committee.
- 2) That the Committee recommends its service plans and their content (Appendix 2 of the report) and recommends their content to the Policy and Resources Committee.

#### **GPS 16/17 ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, FEES AND CHARGES**

The Chairman referred the Committee to the section of the report relating to contaminated bins from flats (2.2), and the proposed charges for the return of bins of three sizes. The Lead Member for Community Safety said the public should be incentivised not to contaminate the contents of the bins or, more accurately, dissuaded from contaminating by way of higher return fees which might reduce the problem. Bins situated in flat blocks were particularly susceptible, and it was evident that some property owners did not take responsibility for the disposal of waste.

The Waste and Environment Manager said the £50 bin return fee was introduced last year and had made no discernible difference. A Member asked what other Councils charged for a similar service, and the Environmental Strategy Manager said some other Authorities charged less, but would check and find out and provide a written reply to the Committee.

A Member said that waste contamination was reduced considerably in his ward following the introduction of food pods. A Member asked if the charge covered the cost of the service, and were Housing Associations meeting their responsibilities? There was an ASB issue if the bin contents resulted in bad odours permeating neighbours' flats and houses, and it was incumbent on Housing Associations to keep things in order.

The Chairman asked whether alternative charges for the return of contaminated bins, in addition to the £50 fee, had been considered. The Waste and Environment Manager said he believed fees of £40, £75 and £100 for 240, 660

and 1100 litre bins respectively would be reasonable, and it was agreed by the Committee that the higher charges be recommended.

With reference to Special Collections (2.4), a Member said the concessionary rate provision was prone to abuse, and that people left various items for collection that could not possibly have originated from a particular property. The Chairman asked how remedial action could be implemented, and the Environmental Strategy Manager said the website would be updated to state that the Council reserved the right to charge an additional fee for collection, or not take away the item(s) in question.

Regarding Animal Control (2.6), the Lead Member for Community Safety asked why there was no proposed cost increase in several cases. He said that dog owners should be incentivised to take responsibility for their dogs, and he proposed an increase. A Member said that the proposed charge of £150 for repatriating a lost dog was substantial, and that people don't lose their pets on purpose. Another Member said many incidents involved the same owners repeatedly. The kennel charges were very cheap, and some dog owners seem not to care about their pets and should take more responsibility. Councillor Debbie Morris proposed, seconded by Councillor Joy Mann, that an increase in kennelling fees for stray dogs was acceptable, and proposed a kennel fee increase to £20 per day.

A Member asked whether the same costs would apply to lost cats, albeit they were more likely to make their own way home. Officers stated that cats were not treated in the same way as dogs as different laws applied.

A Member asked why the removal of graffiti from commercial premises (2.10) was a job for the Council. The Waste and Environment Manager said if a desecrated wall faced the High Street the Council would look to undertake the removal of the graffiti, and in such circumstances the company would pay the Council for doing so.

A Member asked why there was a charge for the removal of dead rats but not mice (2.7). The Environmental Strategy Manager said she believed it was a regulatory issue but would check and let Members know the answer.

(2.9) A Member advised she was quoted £75 to remove a wasp nest recently, and it was agreed that this was too high a price. A Member said it was preferable to keep a wasp nest as wasps were good for the garden and they die off in the winter, but if circumstances warrant their removal, it would be necessary to pay to do so.

The Chairman invited comments and questions from each Member of the Committee about the proposed Garden Waste charges (2.5). The following comments were expressed:

- If the proposed price increase was applied, more fly tipping of garden waste would result,
- The proposed increase was very steep, and residents would interpret it as taking advantage of those who had willingly signed up to the scheme;
- Residents may do away with their garden waste bins as a matter of principle,
- How was the figure of £50 arrived at, and why, if the scheme was as successful as claimed, was it running at a loss?
- Other increases in the report equated to around 2.5% and this proposed increase was much more.

The Chairman responded that it has always been the intention for the garden waste collection service to be cost neutral. The budget for 2017/18 providing the garden waste collection service was based on a lower take-up, and while the Council was pleased with the number of residents signing up and surpassing the budget, it still did not cover the cost of providing the service.

A Member did not accept that the charge would lead to an increase in garden waste fly tipping, but believed the proposed fee was too high, and another Member agreed that the large increase was unfair.

A Member said the proposed Option 2, comprising an increase of £5 per year for the next three years was the Council's method of recovering its costs. More information was required before a decision could be made.

A Member said more home-composting of garden waste would help, and that although the Council was over budget on the service it was not necessarily covering costs as various factors had to be considered, such as paying more collectors. There was currently insufficient information available to make a decision.

The Chairman said the price increase was too high, and the proposed £5 reduction for paying by Direct Debit, to be re-charged if the order was cancelled, was not realistic.

The Lead Member for Community Safety said any price increase would be unpopular, and when the original charge was introduced it met natural resistance. The proposed increase would ultimately be seen as being fairer than increasing Council Tax as it applied to those who used it, and as the service was discretionary he hoped most residents would think it was worth continuing with. The plan had always been for the service to be self-financing, and charges were comparable to other Local Authorities which operated a similar scheme, and had the same issues. More information was required before a decision on the garden waste service charges could be made. He added it would be interesting to see what the drop-off would be in the event of a price increase as lost business would be hard to get back.

A Member asked that a breakdown of the £50 charge be provided.

The Chairman asked that the Committee agree the following amended recommendation:

**Recommendation**

*That, with the exception of the increase in charges for the Garden Waste Service, the Committee agrees the fees and charges detailed within the report as amended and recommends they be approved by the Policy and Resources Committee.*

*That Members agree that, as an objective, income generated from the collection of Garden Waste should cover the cost of providing the service. However the Committee was concerned that the report lacks evidence as to the likely effect that price increases on the scale proposed would have in terms of the anticipated reduction in the number of subscribers to the service, the resultant impact on waste collection tonnages, overall recycling performance and the costs recovered from the Waste Disposal Authority under the Alternative Financial Model (AFM). It therefore requests additional information on these aspects and refers*

*the matter for further consideration by Policy and Resources Committee as part of the budget setting process, with a recommendation that any increase in 2018/19 should take into account the current rate of inflation, the cost of implementing a change in collection charges and the need for prudence in assessing the likely impact of price increases on take-up of the service by residents.*

A Member expressed concern about the ambiguity within the proposed recommendation with regard to the calculation of costs within the report, particularly the grid in which the costs were broken down.

The Head of Community Services said assumptions were made when calculating the costs which were subject to change. A good example of this is that since the report was written, Councils had been informed by the Local Government Scheme of a proposed pay offer for 2018/19 and 2019/20, which if agreed was well above the 1% increase in salaries currently in the grid. A Member added that while predicting costs was clearly difficult, it was not fair that discretionary services be funded by those who cannot use the service.

The Chairman asked the Committee whether it thought the service should be self-funding, and if so, how would the Council achieve that aim?

A Member asked whether all discretionary Council services were self-funding, to which the Head of Community Services replied that in Leisure they currently were not, but the department was working towards that target, given the new Leisure Management Contract and Watersmeet as examples.

The Lead Member for Community Safety seconded the proposal by the Chairman to submit an amended recommendation.

On being put to the Committee the Chairman declared the motion CARRIED the voting being 6 For, 4 Against and 0 Abstentions.

**RECOMMEND:**

*That, with the exception of the increase in charges for the Garden Waste Service, the Committee agrees the fees and charges detailed within the report as amended and recommends they be approved by the Policy and Resources Committee.*

*That Members agree that, as an objective, income generated from the collection of Garden Waste should cover the cost of providing the service. However the Committee was concerned that the report lacks evidence as to the likely effect that price increases on the scale proposed would have in terms of the anticipated reduction in the number of subscribers to the service, the resultant impact on waste collection tonnages, overall recycling performance and the costs recovered from the Waste Disposal Authority under the Alternative Financial Model (AFM). It therefore requests additional information on these aspects and refers the matter for further consideration by Policy and Resources Committee as part of the budget setting process, with a recommendation that any increase in 2018/19 should take into account the current rate of inflation, the cost of implementing a change in collection charges and the need for prudence in assessing the likely impact of price increases on take-up of the service by residents.*

The Environmental Strategy Manager to confirm fees charged by other Herts local authorities were comparable for similar services.

#### **GPS 17/17 GARDEN WASTE; REVIEW OF THE CHARGEABLE SERVICE**

The Chairman asked whether Members of the Committee had any questions to ask the Waste and Environment Manager and the Environmental Strategy Manager.

A Member referred to the increased cost of administering the Green Waste Service, and asked how much greater were the costs and what were the implications to residents.

The Environmental Strategy Manager replied that the take up of the service had been greater than expected, and more costs were therefore incurred in the administration and delivery of the service. The Waste and Environment Manager confirmed that an additional person had been employed to deal with garden waste and other collection services. A Member asked to what extent the charges were due to ongoing operational costs, and how much were one-off start-up costs? The Waste and Environment Manager replied the costs of marketing a new service were one-off, but notifying customers of a price change, for example, was a repeat cost.

With reference to the Terms and Conditions of the service, a Member said that six weeks for a bin replacement was a long time, and the implication therein was that it was acceptable for a user to go six weeks without a bin and not receive a refund. The Environmental Strategy Manager said that bins were usually replaced within two days, and the six weeks stated provided the Council with leeway, particularly if new bins needed to be ordered. The Lead Member for Public Services confirmed that bin replacement usually took between two and three days, and the six weeks was stated in the conditions as an absolute maximum period. It was necessary to have such a leeway in place as the cost of refunds could have a severe financial impact for the Council.

The Member asked about fallen fruit, and asked for clarification regarding which bin, garden waste or food caddy, should be used. She had contacted the CSC earlier in the year to ask the question and was given an answer that contradicted the Terms and Conditions for garden waste. Another Member responded that fallen fruit that had come into contact with meat products should be disposed of in the food caddy, while unsullied fruit could go in with garden waste but for a clear message to residents and to avoid incorrect items going into the brown bin it was easier to say all food to be placed in the food pods.

RESOLVED:

That the Terms and Conditions relating to Garden Waste be agreed, subject to the charging level being updated by Officers once approved by Members.

**Councillor Roger Seabourne in the Chair**

#### **GPS 18/17 STRATEGIC, SERVICE AND FINANCIAL PLANNING 2018-21**

The Chairman introduced the report which enabled the Committee to comment to the Policy and Resources Committee on the Strategic Plan, the Committee's

service plans, and the growth bids to support them for the three years commencing 1 April 2018. The Chairman asked if anyone had any questions or comments to make, and there was none.

Re the Community Support Service

The Head of Community Partnerships said funding was now confirmed from Thrive Homes and Watford Community Housing Trust to extend the pilot. A further application to the Police and Crime Commissioner is awaiting a response.

Re The MARAC Co-ordinator

The Head of Community Partnerships said Officers had reflected on the proportionality of funds requested by The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and did not feel this reflected the budgets of different partners. The Council contributes to MARACs in terms of officer time spent preparing, attending and following up actions from individual cases discussed from Three Rivers. The Council also invests more than most Districts in the Domestic Abuse Caseworker. Individual cases being considered by the MARAC from Three Rivers will be offered support from an Independent Domestic Violence Advisory which TRDC provides accommodation for within its own premises.

- If the Council were not to contribute the full amount requested this would not preclude the Council from engaging in the risk assessment conferences, which are a national best practice.
- The outcomes of the MARACs are currently being audited – and the findings of that audit will be shared with members when published.

The Chairman said that as there were fewer cases of individuals using the service in Three Rivers, would it be possible to renegotiate the CSP's contribution?

A Member asked why the provision of the service was the responsibility of the Council, as opposed to the police and health services etc.

A Member asked if a contribution of £1,900 might be appropriate as it appeared that Three Rivers was paying too much.

The Head of Community Partnerships said if the Committee wished to decide the level of funding for MARAC he would be happy for it to be referred to the Policy and Resources Committee.

The Chairman proposed, duly seconded, that the bid for funding be recommended to the Policy and Resources Committee at the lower figure of £1,900.

RECOMMEND:

that the draft Strategic Plan be referred to the Policy and Resource Committee, and its service plans and recommends their contents to the Policy and Resource Committee with the amended funding figures as agreed.

## **GPS 19/17 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman presented the Committee's work programme for agreement.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee's work programme be agreed.

#### **GPS 20/17 OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business,

#### **GPS 21/17 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

“that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined under paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act. It has been decided by the Council that in all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.”

#### **GPS 22/17 ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FEES AND CHARGES – APPENDIX A**

The Lead Member for Community Safety said he had previously supported concessionary collection of mixed recycling from Local Education Authority (LEA) schools, but the Council's budget no longer allowed for it. The Environmental Strategy Manager said the matter was dictated by legislation, and the Council could not charge LEA schools at the same rate as private schools.

A Member said the only way in which LEA schools could raise money for recycling charges was to cut delivery of education services.

The Environmental Strategy Manager agreed to clarify the legislative position regarding LEA schools to the Committee.

With regard to Clinical Waste fees, Members asked why there was a disparity between the different services e.g. doctors/dental/veterinarian services. The Environmental Strategy Manager and Waste and Environment Manager would investigate and advise Members.

A Member said Private Schools should not be charged at commercial rates as they were charities.

A Member suggested that LEA schools should be able to have recycled waste collected for free and that the Council charges more for collecting residual waste.

#### **RECOMMEND:**

That the proposed charges for 2018/19 be agreed where no additional information was requested but in the cases where further information was sought, these items be referred to the Policy and Resources as part of the budget setting process in January 2018.

that Members of the General Public Services and Community Safety Committee be sent the answers to the questions raised at the meeting.

That public access to the appendix be denied.

**CHAIRMAN**