

Overview and Scrutiny

Committee

6th December 2016

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Jane Potter (Chair), Councillor Gay Hopkins (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Joe Baker, Tom Baker-Price, Matthew Dormer, Andrew Fry, Paul Swansborough, Jennifer Wheeler and Nina Wood-Ford

Also Present:

Councillors John Fisher, Antonia Pulsford and Yvonne Smith
Ms S Harris (Worcestershire Health and Care Trust) and Ms S Smith (Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust)

Officers:

Kevin Dicks, Sam Morgan, John Godwin, Carl Walker and Judith Willis.

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and J Smyth

46. FEES AND CHARGES - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Committee received a report which set out the fees and charges to be levied on services provided by the Council which were to be used as the basis for income targets in the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2017/18 to 2019/20.

Members were advised that the Medium Term Financial Plan had been prepared on the basis that additional income would be generated from fees and charges and that the guideline increase provided to Heads of Service was 3%. Members were informed that a number of increases being proposed were in excess of 3%, as identified in Appendix 1 attached to the report. It was also reported that a number of fees and charges had not been increased and others increased at less than 3%. Heads of Service comments as to the reasons for the increases were also provided.

On behalf of the Head of Environmental Services, the Environmental Services Manager provided additional clarification in relation to the Crematorium / Cemetery fees and charges,

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Chair

specifically in regard to the proposed 20% increases to allow the removal of the triple fee option and non-residential Cremation fees. Members' attention was also drawn to proposals for different price time-slots to make the service more accessible to all changes to the scattering of cremation remains. In respect of interment arrangements for adults aged over 18 Members expressed some concerns about the increase of these fees by 20 per cent. However, Members were advised that, even with the proposed increases, the Council compared favourably with its neighbouring authorities and national figures, currently being 260th out of 278 in terms of low costs.

In relation to the proposed increase in charges for Bulky Waste collections, a proposal was made to increase the proposed fee of £8.20 to £10 for single unit bulky waste collections. Members argued that this would still provide exceptional value for money and would not be prohibitively expensive for the customer. The Committee supported this recommendation being taken to the Executive Committee for consideration.

The Head of Leisure Services reported that, in the context of leisure, the proposed fees and charges had resulted following benchmarking exercises with other local authorities and leisure providers. Justifications had been provided in the Fees and Charges report in relation to the various proposed fees and charges that did not conform to the corporate 3% increase.

RECOMMENDED that

the charge for a single unit bulky waste collection be increased from the proposed fee of £8.20 to £10.00; and

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

50. WORKING GROUPS - UPDATE REPORTS

Budget Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Jane Potter

Councillor Potter reported that the Working Group had been looking at the Council's current arrangements and methodology for internal recharges between Council departments and services which, it was understood, was historical in nature. During discussions with Officers, Members expressed some concerns that the recharging process had not been regularly reviewed to ensure the process was working effectively and that all internal recharges were being

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processed between departments. The Working Group had been advised by Officers that an Officer Working Group was currently reviewing the recharge framework. Councillor Potter advised that, whilst the work being undertaken by the Officer Group was welcomed, Members still felt that the Budget Scrutiny Working Group could have an input into the process.

Councillor Potter also reported that the Working Group had also been looking at other matters, such as housing, including the Right to Buy and Buy Back Schemes and their financial implications for the Council.

Performance Scrutiny Working Group – Chair: Councillor Tom Baker-Price

Lifeline Service - Proposals

Councillor Baker-Price reported that the Working Group had been looking at the Council's Lifeline Service as part of the Group's consideration of a measure on the dashboard for the service, which appeared to indicate a decline in the number of customers using the service. Members noted that the withdrawal of funding from Worcestershire County Council's Supporting People funding had been a key contributory factor for the reduction in use. Councillor Baker-Price advised that the Working Group had been focusing on methods to effectively market and promote the Lifeline Service, by utilising the marketing skills of staff in the Council already.

The Head of Community Services confirmed the loss of County Council funding had been a key issue for the service. She advised however, that there was scope to increase service's customer base and that options were being looked at, including the potential to deliver the various Lifeline Services that can be provided to other local authorities such as Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, which currently provided no Lifeline Service. It was noted that a contract to provide Lifeline Services for Kettering Borough Council was already in place.

The Committee noted and supported Councillor Baker-Price's proposed amendment to the Working Group's recommendation that had been tabled at the meeting. Councillor Yvonne Smith, Portfolio for Community Safety and Regulatory Services advised that she was very supportive of the proposed amendment.

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Monitoring of Members' Training Attendances on Corporate Dashboard - Proposals

Councillor Baker-Price reported on discussions that had taken place with the Democratic Services Manager in relation to Members' attendance at training sessions and at Committee meetings, highlighting that the Working Group had observed varying levels of attendance at Member training sessions. Members were advised that, whilst recognising the need to put training into context – training being seen as good practice or mandatory in order to serve on a Committee or as a substitute, such as for the Council's Planning Committee - the Group were of the view that training was essential to develop the skills needed to participate in the Council's Committee processes.

Councillor Baker-Price advised that the Working Group were therefore recommending that consideration be given to having a measure dedicated to Councillors' attendance at Member Training Sessions on the Council's Corporate Dashboard that would enable data to be monitored, which was supported by the Committee.

Recording of public Committee Meetings – Proposals

Councillor Baker-Price further reported that during discussions the subject of recording public Committee meetings for broadcasting to the public via the Council's Website had also been discussed. The Committee was advised about various neighbouring authorities that broadcast Committee meetings by web casting or audio equipment. The Working Group considered that broadcasting would provide better access to public meetings for residents and demonstrate the Council's willingness for transparency. They were therefore seeking the Committee's views on recommending that a trial broadcast of particular Council meetings be undertaken with a view to introducing permanent broadcasting arrangements in the future.

Members queried whether the costs for broadcasting had been looked at and whether there was currently a budget available to trial the proposal, particularly given the financial position the Council was in. Whilst Members commented that the proposal had merit, it was felt by some that the proposal needed to be financially viable and that all cost and administrative implications should be investigated before any trial was agreed.

On putting this matter to the vote for recommendation to the Executive Committee the proposal was not agreed.

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RECOMMEND to the Executive Committee that

- 1) a review of the recharge process be undertaken to ensure that these are accurately recorded in future;**
- 2) the Head of Community Services be mandated to explore how the Lifeline Service can incorporate a resource within the service and produce a marketing strategy, in co-operation with the Communications Team to:
 - a) better market Lifeline Services to residents; and**
 - b) develop new business opportunities to subsidise the Service.****

RECOMMENDED to the Member Support Steering Group that

a measure should be introduced on the Corporate Dashboard to monitor Members' attendance at training sessions.

RESOLVED that

- 3) the reports be noted.**

(Prior to consideration of this Agenda Item, Councillor Andy Fry declared an Other Disclosable interest in that he was distantly related to the Head of Community Services, who was in attendance at the meeting, through marriage. Councillor Fry remained in the room and participated and voted on the matters discussed.)

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.05 pm