

Overview Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 17 November 2016

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr John Burden (Chair)
Cllr David Hurley (Vice-Chair)

Cllrs: Lee Croxton
Les Howes
William Lambert
Sara Langdale
Lauren Sullivan
Derek Shelbrooke
Michael Wenban

Stuart Bobby	Director (Corporate Services)
Melanie Norris	Director (Communities)
Anita Tysoe	Service Manager (Customer & Theatre Services)
Michelle Batstone	Corporate Change Manager
Chris Wakeford	Committee Services Officer (Scrutiny)

62. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Makhan Singh. Cllr Lauren Sullivan attended as his substitute.

63. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2016 were signed by the Chair.

The Chair highlighted that although the minutes were accurate, he did not feel that the Overview Scrutiny Committee's comments on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2017/18 were accurately reported to Cabinet. The Chair will be raising this issue at Full Council.

64. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

65. Service Review Options: Economic Development and Public Health and Communities

The Director (Corporate Services) and Director (Communities) provided the Overview Scrutiny Committee with the detailed information used to support the proposals that the Cabinet were minded to progress from the Service Review process for Economic Development & Town Centre Management and Public Health & Communities.

The Committee expressed their concern at the absence of Cabinet Members to answer questions on this item and unanimously agreed that this was unacceptable.

The Chair requested that the Committee's disappointment be fed back to Cabinet along with a request that, in future, the appropriate Cabinet Member(s) attend the Committee to answer questions on reports.

The Committee discussed the options that Cabinet agreed to implement, as detailed in Appendices three and four to the report that was considered by Cabinet on 7 November 2016, and made the following comments in relation to the original proposals that underpinned those recommendations and the more detailed plans put forward in those appendices:

- 1. Cease tourism functions in their present form through cessation of Town Centric and a reduced tourism service be provided at the refurbished market by a combined team of officers delivering both tourism and town centre management functions and, additionally, Arts and Heritage activities given the proximity of the market to many of the main cultural and heritage assets in the town.***

The Director (Communities) clarified the following points:

- The tourism offer will be slimmed down and will be delivered via a desk and iPad service at the Market or other visitor points (such as Tilbury Cruise Terminal, Cyclopark, large leisure events) 4 days per week (Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday).
- The remaining staff will be restructured to form a new Town Centre Team which will be based at the Civic Centre.
- The reduced tourism service will involve a reduction in posts but there are vacancies in the Customer Services Department where staff could be redeployed.
- The Council will have the Towncentric building until the end of the financial year, although the tourism function from this location could cease before this time, subject to re-deployments.

Members of the Committee highlighted the following areas:

- IT systems need to be secure in the market i.e. not running on public Wi-Fi
- Better signage is needed in the town to highlight the market and other key locations.
- Volunteers should be considered to assist with the tourism offer in the market and at key visitor points.

The Director (Communities) and Director (Corporate Services) clarified the following points:

- Darren Everden, Service Manager IT Services is looking into IT security in the market
- Implementation of signage is being progressed and will be installed in the New Year.
- The idea of volunteers to assist with the tourism offer in the market and at key visitor points is being explored.

The Committee noted Option 1 and requested that Cabinet clearly demonstrate to Members what the reduced tourism service will look like.

2. Cease the use of gatekeepers to secure pedestrianisation of key town centre routes and replaced with either rising bollards or cameras to enforce the no-entry hours.

The Director (Communities) clarified the following points:

- The preferred option is number plate recognition cameras to enforce the no-entry hours.
- There are major gas works taking place in King Street for 3 months from 1 January 2017 so this provides time to investigate the proposed way forward carefully.

The Committee suggested that the gas works would provide a good opportunity to re-route buses and potentially pedestrianise the town centre for a trial period.

The Committee noted Option 2 and requested that Cabinet come back to the Overview Scrutiny Committee if any changes are made to the proposals.

3. Introduce an on-line booking facility for the booking of sports pitches and move Youth Council responsibilities to Committee Section to allow Leisure officers to devote more to time to sports development.

The Committee noted Option 3.

4. Reduce the budgets for Older Persons and Younger Persons by £25,000 each to produce an annual saving of £50,000.

The Committee noted Option 4.

5. Move officer support for Neighbourhood Forums to Committee Section and reduce the frequency of meetings from four per annum to two per annum. Reduce the forum grants by 50% to £22,000.

The Committee noted Option 5.

6. Reduce expenditure on the Council's programme of events by £50,000 p.a.

Following questions from Members, the Director (Communities) clarified the following points:

- The number of Christmas events will be reduced but the Christmas lights, Christmas light switch on event and the Christmas Market will all continue.
- The Council has a sponsorship strategy in place and will pursue all potential funding options.

The Committee noted Option 6.

7. Given that the provision of the annual fireworks display was originally at the request of and funded by Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) in order to reduce the risk of fires and accidents from home bonfires and displays, seek an annual contribution of £15,000 from that Service to future years' displays.

Following questions from Members, the Director (Communities) clarified the following points:

- Cabinet had agreed that the fireworks budget won't be cut but the Council will look for savings and sponsorship to reduce the annual cost.

The Committee noted Option 7.

8. In liaison with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder, officers be requested to discuss with the Gr@nd service delivery options that will assist the Council's budget position.

The Committee noted Option 8.

The Committee discussed and debated the pros and cons of an investigation into whether it is possible to re-name Gravesend - 'Gravesend-Upon-Thames'.

Resolved that the Committee's comments on Cabinet's proposals, as detailed above, be reported back to Cabinet for consideration, but that the implementation of the recommendations not be deferred.

66. Review of the Corporate Customer Service Charter - putting the customer first

The Service Manager (Customer & Theatre Services) provided Members of the Overview Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to provide feedback for consideration on the draft Customer Service Charter: Putting the Customer First before its annual review is completed.

The Customer Service Charter was developed over several years and sets out the standards that are expected across the authority.

The Charter is used as the basis for the Customer Service Training programme delivered to new staff joining the authority.

During the current review, it is considered appropriate to expand the equality section including more detailed reference to the council's Equality Policy which sets the tone for the level of service customers should expect.

The Committee praised the excellent customer service they had experienced at the Council but requested that the technical issues with the switchboard/voice recognition system be addressed as well as the need for a messaging service at the Brookvale Depot.

Following a question from a Member of the Committee, The Service Manager (Customer & Theatre Services) explained that training and support is available for staff who deal with difficult customers.

The Committee commended the Customer Service department for their sterling work and requested that their comments be fed back to the team.

Resolved that the Committee noted and supported the Corporate Customer Service Charter: Putting the Customer first.

67. Member Training 2016-17 - Update.

The Committee considered an update on the Member Training that has taken place so far in 2016-17.

Since the start of the municipal year, the following training has taken place:

Statement of Accounts	05 July 2016
Council Tax Reduction Scheme	14 July 2016
Planning Design	19 September 2016
Housing Enforcement (Private Landlords)	21 September 2016
Equality & Diversity Training	03 October 2016
Child Protection (Safeguarding)	17 October 2016
Housing Allocations	18 October 2016

For the remainder of the 2016-17 municipal year, the following training has been scheduled:

Modern Slavery and PREVENT	24 November 2016
IT Strategy and Digital Strategy	05 December 2016
Regulatory Board	20 December 2016
Data Protection & Freedom of Information	18 January 2017
Waste and Recycling	14 February 2017
Claiming and assessment of HB/CTRS plus Welfare Reform Update	21 March 2017

A training plan for the 2017-18 municipal year is currently being worked on and this will be circulated to Members before the end of March 2017.

The Director (Corporate Services) advised Members that at the Finance & Audit Committee on 16 November 2016 it was suggested that the Fraud Awareness Briefing be incorporated into the Member Training and Development Plan. The Corporate Change Manager will look into this.

The Committee requested that a wireless microphone be made available for training sessions to assist the trainer.

The Chair advised that some Members had expressed concern over the wording associated with the training that 'requires' Members to attend.

Resolved that the Committee noted the information contained within the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm