

POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Thursday, 18 September 2014

Present: Councillor M McLaughlin (Chair)

Councillors P Doughty M Sullivan
P Brightmore KJ Williams
A Leech J Williamson
C Muspratt W Clements
W Smith S Williams

Deputies: Councillors D Elderton (in place of C Blakeley)
B Berry (in place of T Anderson)
G Ellis (in place of M Hornby)
D Mitchell (in place of P Gilchrist)

22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting and asked if there were any apologies. The Committee Services Officer informed the meeting that there were a number of deputies present for Committee Members who were absent. (See the list above).

23 CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST RELEVANT AUTHORITIES (DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS) REGULATIONS 2012, INCLUDING PARTY WHIP DECLARATIONS

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state the nature of the interest.

Members were reminded that they should also declare whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement.

No such declarations were made.

The Chair asked the Head of Legal and Member Services to give advice on the matter of signatories to the call-in notice sitting on the Committee.

The Head of Legal and Member Services informed the Committee that although being a signatory to a call-in notice did not preclude a Member from

sitting on the Committee hearing the call-in they would need to be mindful of pre-determination and bias. Simply supporting a call-in did not necessarily amount to a member accepting the reasons had been made out and proven. A call-in notice was essentially confirmation that there was a prima facie case to review how the Executive decision in question had been reached; and did not amount to the settled view of the member(s) supporting the call-in.

Councillor Mitchell informed the Committee that he was deputising on the Committee for Councillor Gilchrist and was there with a clear and open mind.

24 **CALL-IN OF A DELEGATED DECISION - CABINET MINUTE NO. 27 - FINANCIAL MONITORING 2014/15**

In accordance with the procedure previously agreed by the Committee, the Chair referred to the decision of the Cabinet relating to the Financial Monitoring Report 2014/15 Month 2 in respect of part 5 of the resolution (Cabinet Minute 27 (7/7/14) refers).

The decision had been called-in by Councillors S Kelly, C Carubia, P Gilchrist, P Williams, C Blakeley, D Mitchell and P Hayes on the following grounds:

“To disagree with paragraph (5) of minute 27 (Cabinet 7th July 2014) - changes to Public Health grant funded projects identified in Annex 4 of Appendix A listed as “Health Outcomes Fund - Efficiencies and Stopping” Having regard to Cabinet’s decision of 10th October 2013, which noted that progress and spend would be monitored by The Public Health Department on a regular basis, no information on the impact on the previously agreed outcomes for each project that it is proposed to curtail or stop was placed before Cabinet on the 7th July prior to making the decision. Particular areas of concern -

- (a) Forest Schools - The Forest Schools project has had 727 children from 14 schools attending so far with plans for 6 schools to take part from September. This decision will mean a reduction of participation of 50% of early years children able to take part and a reduction in children able to attend from schools from 30 to 15 per class. This results in schools being treated differently part way through the programme
- (b) Healthy Homes - Fewer homes will be able to benefit from grant assistance in bringing houses up to acceptable healthy standards. The decision will mean, based on the average cost of cosyhomes grants processed to date of £2,564 a reduction in help for 21 households Cabinet should not therefore approve the changes to the projects identified in Annex 4 of Appendix A until Families and Wellbeing Policy and Performance Committee has had an opportunity to scrutinise in full the impact on the agreed outcomes for each project affected.

Monitoring information by the Public Health Department should be made available to the Families and Wellbeing Policy and Performance Committee to enable them to properly advise Cabinet, in due course, of the impact of the proposed reductions to enable a fully informed decision to be taken about each project.

With regards to the funding for the Forest Schools and Healthy Homes projects Cabinet is urged to reconsider its decisions and restore the original level of grant funding so that the projects can build on the levels of participation and uptake as originally envisaged.”

The Committee was invited to consider the decision that had been made and determine, in the light of evidence to be presented, the most appropriate course of action. The Committee had no power to overturn a Cabinet decision, or to substitute its own decision in place of the original. The options open to the Committee in this case were:

- to take no further action, in which case the original decision shall take immediate effect and may be implemented;
- to refer the decision back to the Cabinet Member for reconsideration, setting out in writing the nature of the Committee’s concerns.

The Head of Legal and Member Services advised that the third option detailed within the call-in procedure was not applicable given the nature and arguments presented during the call-in.

Explanation of the Call-In by the Lead Signatory, Councillor Stuart Kelly

Councillor Kelly provided a brief explanation of the call-in, he stated that the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Tourism and Culture had reported on the success of Forest Schools in her report to Council on 14 July, 2014 and that two schools were making Forest Schools part of their intervention methodology after seeing the positive effects. The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods, Housing and Engagement had stated in his report to Council on 14 July, 2014, that the ‘Housing Standards Team were successful in securing Public Health Outcomes funding to extend the Healthy Homes project into the Community NHS Trust until 1 April 2015 to help reduce health inequalities.

He referred to an email from Lisa Newman on the impact of the Healthy Homes budget being cut and a reduction in help to up to 21 households assuming the average grant was given. Some of the Health Outcomes Fund had been capitalised and the Healthy Homes project was already in the capital programme so why not seek to capitalise revenue.

He expressed concern at the impact of the £35,000 cut to the Forest Schools programme and that schools were now being asked to select 15 children

rather than 30 per class. It was a matter of fairness because those going earlier in the programme would have been able to send 30 but now schools could only send 15.

Explanation of the Decision Taken by the Cabinet – Councillor Phil Davies – Leader of the Council

Councillor Phil Davies reminded the Committee that these were both time limited projects for 2013/14 and 2014/15. Both of which had to have public health outcomes. He outlined the selection process for all the projects which after having been agreed were reviewed to see whether a project still required all the funding. This was done at the time of making significant savings due to Government cuts and then the report was taken to Cabinet in July.

The Forest Schools project had exceeded its original target of 660 participants fairly early on with over 700 taking part by the end of year 1. Because it had started late and exceeded its target it was asked if money could be saved. Experience had also showed that the children got more out of the project if they were in smaller groups and that was why the reduction from 30 to 15 per group was made and he did not accept that the original objective of the project had been affected.

The Healthy Homes project had exceeded its target with over 220 healthy homes visits and a successful bid for £289,000 of capital funding, this project was effectively delivering all of its outcomes.

Both projects were delivering through prudent financial management without anybody losing out. It would be a real concern if the original budgets were restored as he was not confident that the projects could deliver anymore if the funding was restored. He requested that the Committee should confirm the decision of Cabinet.

The Chair then agreed that as two of the witnesses had been called by both the lead signatory of the call-in and the Cabinet Member they be called only once to provide evidence / information to the Committee.

Evidence from Call-In Witnesses

Mary Worrall, Senior Manager Parks and Countryside Services

Mary Worrall outlined the project to the Committee, which had started in November, 2013 as a pilot scheme. The original intention was to start the project in October, 2013, although approval had not been given until October. Up to now 727 children had taken part from 14 schools. Schools had aspirations for a whole class to take part though as the project had progressed it had become clear that children benefitted more on a one-to-one level and this was best achieved through a group with an optimum size of 15.

There had been an underspend in the first year of £18,000 and so this had been deducted for the second year.

The Committee then asked Ms Worrall some questions and her responses included the following comments:

- There had been input from the Rangers on the best size of a group to get the maximum benefit.
- Lessons had been learnt from the first year that smaller groups did benefit more.
- The early years team had supported two events for the project.
- She outlined the original intended outcomes and also the contributions made from schools which ranged from £200 for subsidised schools up to £1,650 when schools had sent more than 15 children.
- With a two year pilot the project was well on its way to achieving its objectives and she outlined the qualitative measures which also formed part of the outcomes.
- By the end of the two years up to 23 different classes would have been held.

Lisa Newman, Senior Manager Housing Strategy

Lisa Newman outlined the healthy homes project which had run for a number of years and which had secured public health outcomes funding up to April 2015. It was run as a single assessment process with the Housing Standards Team working alongside health partners.

The Committee then asked Ms Newman some questions and her responses included the following comments:

- Significant progress had been made working with partner agencies and they had made commitments as to the way referrals were undertaken.
- There were a wide range of household compositions accessing the grants from older people to younger people with mental health problems.
- She confirmed that the Housing Standards Team had been consulted on the proposed cut to funding in May 2014 and had been asked what the potential impact could be.
- The number of assessments carried out was ahead of the target.
- The Team could potentially achieve the higher target of providing up to 24 loans and grants.
- The capital programme funding would be sufficient to address any shortfall.
- There was £289,000 of funds unallocated with 72 people on the waiting list, although that was not to say there wouldn't be an increase in the number of applicants in the winter months.

- Forecasts of the numbers to be helped were based on figures for the previous years and even with the reduction in funding all those currently assessed would be able to receive loans / grants.
- If all the funding was used up other avenues of funding sources would be looked at and reported to Members.

Evidence from Cabinet Member's Witness

Kevin Adderley, Strategic Director Regeneration and Environment; Fiona Johnstone, Director of Public Health / Head of Policy and Performance

Kevin Adderley stated that the Cosy Homes scheme had been around a number of years and that the Forest Schools project was a relatively new initiative.

The Chief Executive Strategy Group had been reviewing all the Public Health Outcomes Funding because of the budget situation and what each project was trying to achieve. They had agreed that as there had been an £18,000 underspend on the Forest Schools project in the first year, funding could be reduced by a further £18,000 on the undertaking that there was no reduction in outcomes. The Cosy Homes or Healthy Homes project was funded through both the Public Health Outcomes Funding and the capital programme and the reduction was based on the fact that there were capital programme monies available. He was comfortable with both these projects that there would be no impact on what was trying to be achieved.

The Committee then asked Mr Adderley some questions and his responses included the following comments:

- Every Public Health Outcomes Funding project was reviewed, some were chosen to continue and others to stop.
- The recommendation was that these two projects should absolutely continue because of their excellent work and that they would be able to deal with a reduction in their funding.
- There was no need to capitalise the Cosy Homes fund because capital funding was available.
- They were all private sector homes that received grants and he was confident that all those that came forward and were suitably assessed could be helped.

Fiona Johnstone gave an outline of the Public Health Outcomes Funding and stated that a panel, consisting of the Portfolio Holder, Chief Executive and Director of Public Health, had met to review all the Public Health Outcomes Funding projects. Two questions were posed, 'Could we see a clear line of sight between the proposal and a public health outcome?' and 'Whether or not there was a good chance of feasibly delivering the project?' These recommendations had been put forward in October 2013 for a number of

schemes to be included. Projects were reviewed on an eight monthly basis by the Public Health team monitoring progress and financial expenditure.

A number of considerations were made at this review, including, whether there was an opportunity to fund through the capital programme, could efficiencies be made in delivering the project, had the project timing had any impact on the in year spend and were there any legal commitments.

All the projects would be evaluated in May / June 2015 on their outcomes.

The Committee then asked Ms Johnstone some questions and her responses included the following comments:

- No projects had been given extra funding.
- Every project had had a written assessment before any decision to reduce funding.
- The decision to reduce funding was taken if a project could be undertaken more efficiently and not as a way to change any outcomes.

Summary of the Lead Call-In Signatory, Councillor Stuart Kelly

Councillor Kelly, in summing up, stated that the ring-fenced grant ought to be spent on public health outcomes. Forest schools had been a victim of its own success. He suggested that if 15 was the optimum size for a class to benefit from the project then why not have two classes of 15. With regard to Healthy Homes, although the Housing Standards Team had been resourceful in finding funding there must be more homes in need of intervention. The reduction in funding had nothing to do with next year's budget but rather the stability of this year's budget.

Summary of the Cabinet Member, Councillor Phil Davies

Councillor Phil Davies, in summing up, stated that as these two projects had effectively achieved their original outcomes having underspent, it was sensible to make the savings. These decisions had been taken against the backdrop of savage Government cuts in the Council's budget. He did not believe that if the budgets were restored the funding could be spent by April 2015. He would like to see the two projects continue although the money should be forming part of the Council's mainstream budget.

The funding reductions were based on prudent financial management and he asked that the Committee endorse the Cabinet decision.

The Chair then opened the matter for debate.

A Member suggested that this was a classic example of officers working efficiently in difficult circumstances.

Other Members suggested that the public health money was not part of the Council's budget problem as it was ringfenced and should be left alone.

Having carefully considered the options open to the Committee it was moved by Councillor Doughty and seconded by the Chair, that –

“This Committee congratulates the officers on the successful implementation of these projects and their prudent financial management and that as a result of questions asked and evidence presented the decision of the Cabinet of 7 July, 2014 on Financial Monitoring 2014/15, be upheld.”

It was then moved as an amendment by Councillor Clements and seconded by Councillor Elderton, that –

“This Committee congratulates the officers on the successful implementation of these projects and their prudent financial management and that the Committee refers this matter back to Cabinet asking that this ring-fenced money be retained for the projects that need it.”

The amendment was put and lost (6:9)

The motion was put and carried (9:6)

Resolved (9:6) –

This Committee congratulates the officers on the successful implementation of these projects and their prudent financial management and that as a result of questions asked and evidence presented the decision of the Cabinet of 7 July, 2014 on Financial Monitoring 2014/15, be upheld.