

APPENDIX 4 – DRAFT MINUTE EXTRACT

BUSINESS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 24 JANUARY 2017

50 BUDGET PROPOSALS WORKSHOP

In view of the presence of a large number of public, the Chair agreed to vary the order of business and take this item next.

A report from the Chair presented the work of Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee in relation to scrutinising the 2017/18 budget proposals. A workshop had been held on 9 January for Members to explore in more detail the various budget proposals being put forward that fell under the remit of this committee. A report on the workshop was included as an appendix to the report. The Committee was requested to acknowledge this report as its response to the 2017/18 budget proposals to be referred on to Cabinet as part of its considerations in developing any budget recommendation to Council.

The Chair reiterated for the benefit of the public present that this Committee would only be discussing these proposals put forward by officers and no decisions were being taken.

Rob Clifford, Senior Manager – Commissioning, gave a presentation to the Committee on the details of the budget savings proposals for car parking charges. This included the proposals:

- To increase parking charges by 50p on all existing tariffs.
- To introduce a flat rate daily tariff of £4 for parking at Country Parks – Arrowe Country Park, Eastham Country Park, Royden Country Park, Wirral Country Park with charges at Birkenhead Park being introduced in 2018/19.
- To introduce charging at locations where parking was currently free including some locations in New Brighton, West Kirby, Hoylake, Heswall, Liscard, Bromborough, Bebington, Irby, Upton and Moreton.

The total savings generated by these proposals would amount to £1.3m over 2017/18 and 2018/19.

The Chair then opened the matter up for debate by the Committee.

Councillor Blakeley expressed his disappointment that Members didn't have the details on the proposals until last Wednesday, whereas it was made available to the press on the Friday before that. He suggested that officers had been secretive with the information. He remarked that the presentation had referred to the factoring in of drops in usage of car parks but had any assessment been made of the impact on side streets if parking charges were introduced in shopping areas and commented that it would do nothing to enhance the shopping experience.

The Chair stated that what was happening now was pre-decision scrutiny and it was ludicrous to suggest any secretiveness on the part of officers. No decisions had been made whatsoever and the proposals were out for public consultation.

The Assistant Chief Executive informed the meeting that the proposals formed part of a £33m package of measures put forward to go towards savings of £42m which were needed for 2017/18. He elaborated on the issue of information appearing in the press and stated that two entirely separate processes had been followed, one in which at the closed workshop Members had asked for a presentation to this Committee and secondly an enquiry made to the press office which the press officer was able to answer using information from the Statutory Notice which was being prepared for publication in the local press.

Responding to comments, Rob Clifford stated that an estimate had been made of a 30 per cent reduction in the use of the country parks' car parks if the proposals were introduced but no detailed assessment had been made with regard to side streets around shopping centres. The proposals were purely about addressing the budget gap.

Councillor Ellis commented that Cabinet had made a serious error and that there would be very serious repercussions for shopping centres within the borough with many smaller shops having to close down.

The Chair stated that the Council was losing a further £42m from its 2017/18 budget and because of Government cuts the Council would cease to exist as it was known now by 2020. The Council had been forced into a corner since 2010.

Councillor Mitchell as well as raising the issue of Section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and the issue of local authorities raising revenue through car parking, also referred to the impact on surrounding areas to where parking charges could be introduced and the fact that two country parks, Eastham and Wirral, had two of the longest cul-de-sacs on Wirral.

In response Rob Clifford stated that there were two streams of parking income, one from off-street parking (Section 32 and 33) which could be used for any traffic related budgetary purposes and the other from on street parking (Section 55) in which the income was restricted to the costs incurred by the Council in policing or the provision or maintenance of off-street parking.

Councillor Abbey reminded the Committee that officers were the authors of this document and that they were proposals with no decisions having yet been taken. There was a need for more evidence as to the impacts these proposals could have.

Responding to further comments from Members, Rob Clifford stated that there was no other consultation proposed other than through the Traffic Regulation Order notices in the press and the consultation with this Committee. The proposals had been copied to the four Constituency Managers who would have greater awareness of groups within their respective areas to consult with. All parking revenue data was published each year and enforcement of parking charges was not used as a revenue raising tool.

The Chair commented that no pay and display machines had been procured but that officers had been given authority to find out the costs if it was needed. He agreed that the matter should be looked at by the Committee from a public health point of view.

Councillor Ward referred to the huge cuts in funding from the Government which had led to officers having to put forward unpalatable proposals such as this. The report, however, was seriously lacking in vital information to enable the Committee to scrutinise the positive and negative impacts of the proposals.

Responding to further comments the Assistant Chief Executive commented that procurement processes had commenced and officers did carry out preliminary discussions as they had to plan as if the proposals were adopted to ensure a full year's income from the proposals. Rob Clifford confirmed that the Cabinet Member had signed off the commencement of a procurement process and the Chair stated that this was due process.

The Chair, in response to a suggestion from Councillor Blakeley, stated that he would not allow any members of the public to speak.

It was then moved by Councillor Ward, and seconded by Councillor Abbey –

“That this Committee requests officers to develop a full report which considers the impact on small businesses, traffic and the wider community to enable Councillors to fully scrutinise all aspects of the affects which may occur in an increase or implementation of parking charges.”

It was then moved as an amendment by Councillor Blakeley and seconded by Councillor Steve Williams, that –

- “1. Committee notes the numerous petitions of objection, totalling over 15,000 signatures to date.
2. Committee notes the level of public anger and opposition to these proposals.
3. Committee recognises the potential damage the introduction of car parking charges will do to the already struggling town centre shopping areas.
4. Committee also recognises that charging for parking in Country Parks, with an estimated drop in usage of 30% of users will have a detrimental effect on public health.”

It was then moved as a further amendment by Councillor Mitchell and seconded by Councillor Blakeley, that –

“The option not be taken up by Cabinet.”

The amendment moved by Councillor Mitchell was put and lost (6:9).

The amendment moved by Councillor Blakeley was put and lost (6:9)

The motion was then put and carried (10:5).

Resolved (10:5) - That this Committee requests officers to develop a full report which considers the impact on small businesses, traffic and the wider community to enable Councillors to fully scrutinise all aspects of the affects which may occur in an increase or implementation of parking charges.