



Leicester
City Council

MINUTE
EXTRACT

Minutes of the Meeting of the
STRATEGIC PLANNING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Held: WEDNESDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2006 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor A. Vincent- Chair
Councillor Kitterick- Labour Spokesperson
Councillor Porter–Conservative Spokesperson

Councillor Fitch (for Cllr. Henry) Councillor Thomas
Councillor Renold Councillor Waddington)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor Farmer– Cabinet Member for Strategic Community Renewal and
Safety

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89. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests they may have in the business on the agenda, and/ or indicate that Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 applied to them.

There were no declarations.

94. DEPARTMENTAL REVENUE STRATEGY

The Corporate Director of Regeneration and Culture submitted a report presenting the Revenue Budget Strategy of Regeneration and Culture 2006/7 – 2008/9.

The Corporate Director noted that at the previous meeting Members asked questions regarding burial and cremation costs and income from Pre Planning Advice. She noted that cost increases for burials were as follows:-

Cremation – from £325 to £385, 18% increase
Interment - from £325 to £350, 8% increase
99 year lease on a grave from £500 to £750, 50% increase
a new category – ‘grave with curbing’ would cost £1500

With regard to pre planning advice, the estimate was that it would bring in

£60,000, based on 6% of fee income, but this would need to be tested.

She then outlined the main points of the Revenue Budget strategy.

Members of the Committee expressed concerns about the increase in costs for burials and cremation. It was suggested that these could be spread over the three years of the strategy. It was proposed that the increase in grave costs be 17.3% over each year of the strategy and that cremation be phased in over two years with increases of 10% and 8%.

Queries, comments and concerns were raised about the following areas, to which the Corporate Director responded:-

The loss of the Riverside Team Leader. This post was currently vacant and Riverside work would be managed in future by the parks service. This would mean greater access to management support and resources.

The loss of the Fundraising Post. This post was supposed to be self funding from sponsorship sources not grants, it hadn't proved to be possible to self fund this post.

The redundancy and retirement costs associated with management reductions. These were included at budget line 8.

Property Gazetteer, was it open to the public? could it be used to bring in income? The Corporate Director agreed to check if it was open to the public. It was being considered as part of the Business Improvement Programme and consideration of income could be part of this process. The additional costs now were to ensure that the planning service didn't subsidise the costs in future.

The costs associated with Bursom Ball mill. This was an accounting issue due unachieved income from a previous year.

A Cash reward scheme for consistent recyclers was proposed. This could be considered, and would need to be discussed with Biffa.

The effect of the reduction to the Dog Warden service was queried. The Corporate Director agreed to provide information on this matter.

It was queried why there had been changes to the budget from the version previously discussed by the Committee. The previous budget was a work in progress, and arguments put forward by Members, staff and unions had been taken on board. However, the major change was due to better than expected financial settlement to the whole Council.

Would the reduction in specialist planning advice mean greater use of consultants and was it expected that the need for specialist advice was going down? There may be a case for specialist consultants where they fulfilled a short term need Other ways of achieving the saving would be considered, such as selling the Council's specialist knowledge or buying it in. It was expected

that need for specialist planning advice over the future of this strategy would change, not go down.

Would there be greater income from new licensing powers and future gaming licenses? There were costs as well as income, initially the costs were likely to outweigh income, but it was expected that new work would break even over time.

It was felt that the risk assessment matrix should read that there was a high likelihood of not achieving savings. The Corporate Director felt that the savings were achievable. The department had a good track record of delivering savings with the recent merger and The Project review of culture and neighbourhood services.

Why had the decision been changed with regard to LSEP funding? Representations had been received on this matter and funding had been provided to support the LSEP. Councillor Farmer indicated that he didn't support funding the LSEP.

What use could the LRC make of the £50,000 that they had previously received but weren't this year? This was felt to be a matter for the LRC.

It was queried why it had taken so long to realise the accounting difficulties with advertising income. The accounting difficulties were recognised early on in the contract period, but were being contained within existing budgets. The current measure deals with the problem.

Did £15,000 represent a big increase from current speciality market funding and would the daily market be affected by more speciality markets? The Corporate Director agreed to provide information about the current level of speciality markets income. Market research had shown that speciality markets brought increased footfall to the resident market.

It was considered important to have Economic Development Officers in communities. The Corporate Director said that the changes proposed in this area could be reconsidered.

It was felt that more permanent measures needed to be implemented for Gypsy and Travellers, the proposed defence measures would not deal with the problem, sites were needed. The proposed defence measures would target vulnerable parks and open spaces.

The situation with the Haymarket Car Park was queried. The Council had a lease on the car park and theatre. The proposal was to dispose of both, the car park requires money being spent on it for repairs, there is be a backdated rent increase due on it and the Theatre trust are due to move out of the theatre building in 2007, when the rent due will fall to the Council.

The impact on De Montfort Hall from the VAT claw back was queried. The

theatre had negotiated a VAT exemption which meant they had increased their un-earned income in recent years. This claw back was taking some of the money from this extra un-earned income.

The issue of the length of time that the Committee had to scrutinise the budget was raised.

RESOLVED:

- (1) that the Committee expresses its concerns to the Chief Executive, through the Cabinet, that it has not had sufficient time to give consideration and full scrutiny to the finalised budget proposals;
- (2) that the Committee expresses its concern about removing an economic development worker from either the Saffron or Belgrave areas of the city;
- (3) that a clearer message should be provided to Council about what is proposed at budget line 14, reduction of specialist planning advice; it was felt that selling Council services was different from the reduction of 2.5 full time staff;
- (4) that Cabinet be requested to give consideration to phasing the increases in costs to burials and cremations.