

Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee

A meeting of Arts Leisure & Culture Select Committee was held on Wednesday, 9th September, 2009.

Present: Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell (Chairman), Cllr Dick Cains, Cllr Aidan Cockerill (Vice Cllr Andrew Sherris), Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Alan Lewis, Cllr Mick Womphrey

Officers: Andy Bryson (RES), Richard McGuckin, Julie Higgins (DNS), Judith Trainer, Sarah Whaley (LD)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Hilary Aggio, Cllr Kath Nelson, Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr Sylvia Walmsley,

1 Evacuation Procedure

The Evacuation Procedure was noted

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Draft minutes from the meeting held on 15th July 2009

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 15th July 2009.

CONCLUDED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 15th July 2009 be agreed as a true record.

4 Draft minutes from the meeting held on 29th July 2009

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 29th July 2009.

CONCLUDED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 15th July 2009 be agreed as a true record.

5 Efficiency Improvement & Transformation Gateway Review

Members were asked to consider, comment and challenge the Baseline review summary which was provided by the officer project team which were undertaking the review of Highways, Network Management and Street Lighting.

The Built and Natural Environment Manager presented Members with the Baseline Summary which covered the following items as detailed below:

- 1) Street Lighting
- 2) Highway Improvement Works
- 3) Highway Network Management

Members learned that Stockton Borough Council were currently responsible for 27000 street lights and 3000 road signs which Technical Services managed via an outside contractor David Webster Ltd. The Committee heard that the current Street Lighting budget was £2.3M of which £1.4M was spent on energy costs alone.

Members went on to question the type of lighting currently used by the Council and what the possibilities were for changing to more energy efficient options such as:

- 1) Solar lighting
- 2) Dual powered lighting (solar and electricity)

The Committee then heard how many old and obsolete lighting columns the Council had and that maintenance for these was high, however newer more modern columns required little maintenance if any at all. Members also heard that 1200 dimmed street lights had been introduced to the borough which had been funded by the Carbon Management Fund. Capital Investment into replacing old and obsolete columns will significantly reduce both their energy usage and their maintenance costs. Capital investment in dimming technology will reduce energy costs. An invest to save, prudential borrowing or PFI solution could realise significant annual revenue savings. Other opportunities were also discussed such as supporting neighbouring authorities with their street lighting activities where David Webster currently provide the same service. The price of green energy was also discussed and the Committee were informed that the cost of this was approx. 10% higher. The Built and Natural Environment Manager and Finance Manager agreed to come back with actual costs for green energy. IT was confirmed that Stockton's energy was purchased through the North East Purchasing Organisation (NEPO).

The Built and Natural Environment Manager informed the Committee that there was currently an initiative in place to replace all keep left bollards with a new type of bollard which worked via hinges and reflectors therefore was hard to damage and would have a positive impact on energy savings. This programme had already been rolled out in Eaglescliffe, however, if the rest of the borough was to be replaced on mass then capital funding would be required otherwise a phased approach would be needed.

Members then moved onto Highway Improvement Works where it was learned that capital funding for highway improvement schemes was provided by central Government through the Local Transport Plan which is approx. £3.5M per annum. The Built and Natural Environment Manager and Members discussed the possibility of developing a new procurement strategy and removing the need to competitively tender every single project with the hope that giving contractors longer term contracts this would give stability and encourage more competitive pricing. Members heard that there was some overlap in services provided by Technical Services and Direct Services and there could be an opportunity to consider the role of a joint delivery manager for all highway improvement works over the value of £100K, however although there seemed to be opportunities for streamlining operations any efficiencies would not be directly related to SBC revenue streams.

The Built and Natural Environment Manager introduced Highway Network Management and outlined to Members the current budgets relating to this. The Committee were given a brief overview of the Traffic Management Act 2004 and heard how the Council had a statutory duty to inspect and maintain the highway and ensure traffic keeps flowing throughout the authority and neighbouring authorities. One of the areas which came under Highway Network Management was bus shelter maintenance which has an annual budget of £42K and was currently managed by Technical Services however it was believed that this should be moved to Direct Services and absorbed into routine unscheduled highway maintenance.

Finally the Committee heard how members of the public were consulted on a number of things such as Traffic Calming Schemes however this did pose a cost to the Council and in some instances costs were significant. The Built and Natural Environment Manager offered Members solutions which could be implemented in future consultations such as

- 1) Use of internet (which was already common practice)
- 2) Postcard delivery, encouraging households to use the web
- 3) Asking residents to register e-mail addresses so updates could be sent electronically.

CONCLUDED that the options for this review be brought back to the next meeting of this committee on 7th October detailing and addressing the opportunities raised as detailed above.

6 Work Programme

The Scrutiny Officer confirmed with the Committee that the next meeting of the 7th October would deal with the next stage of the review of Highways, Lighting and Network Management.

CONCLUDED that the information be noted.