

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting16th December 2010

1. Title of Item/Report

EIT Review - Built and Natural Environment - Report of Environment Select Committee

2. Record of the Decision

Members considered a report by the Environment Select Committee. The Select Committee had examined four areas of the Built and Natural Environment services and applied the EIT processes to determine where changes should take place within the Blue Badge Scheme, School Crossing Patrol Service, Urban Design Team, and Car Parking.

Blue Badge Scheme

The Disabled Persons' Parking Badge Scheme provided a national arrangement of on-street parking concessions for severely disabled people who are unable, or find it difficult, to use public transport. The Regulations governing the Scheme gave local authorities the discretion to charge an application fee, but this could not exceed £2. In Stockton Council the staffing, stationary, and the purchase of badges had been calculated to cost £28 per badge. Some additional income could be realised by the Council providing the photo's required for the Blue Badges.

Sunderland City Council provided information to the Committee having used 'Lean Processing' to improve the speed of providing Blue Badge assessments, which in turn was improving customer satisfaction. The overall savings could not yet be quantified although based on the estimated cost of processing the fee Sunderland were expecting savings of at least £85,800. A proportion of the saving was due to the loss of an Occupational Therapist whereas Stockton Council, along with 10 other north-east LAs, utilised GP assessments and therefore would not see such savings.

School Crossing Patrols

Stockton Borough Council had responsibility for the School Crossing Patrol service which consisted of; 1 Road Safety Officer, 3 Senior

Patrollers, 2 Mobile Patrollers and 54 Static Patrollers at annual cost of £350,000.

The service was operated in accordance with the adopted National Guidelines for the operation of School Crossing Patrols. The National Guidelines provided a clear procedure for determining whether a School Crossing Patrol site was justified.

It was explained that 35 sites met the numerical criteria and had no Alternative crossing facility. The National Guidance also states that School Crossing Patrols should not operate on a light controlled crossing unless there are exceptional circumstances. 17 sites met the numerical criteria but operated on light controlled or zebra crossings and 6 sites no longer met the criteria but were served by a School Crossing Patrol.

Cabinet was informed that the Select Committee was recommending the closure of seven school crossing patrol sites, where a puffin or pelican crossing was available or where the site no longer met the numerical criteria. Cabinet noted the sites concerned.

- Oxbridge Lane/Marlborough Road (Oxbridge)
- Yarm Road/St Peters Road (Oxbridge)
- The Green/Duckpond (Norton)
- Yarm Road/Butts Lane (Yarm)
- Thornaby Road/Windsor Road (Thornaby)
- Thorntree Road/Humber Road (Thornaby)
- Norton Ave/Recreation Ground Entrance (Norton Grange)

It was explained that all sites were resurveyed every 3 years. Where a new development was to take place it was suggested that S106 agreements could be used to secure a puffin or pelican crossing was established rather than introduce a School Crossing Patrol. The Committee was eager for a policy to be developed that would ensure that this occurred in the future.

Urban Design

The Urban Design team was formed in 2006 as part of a re-organisation bringing together engineering and landscape architects professionals. The team provide a co-ordinated input into the planning service on aspects

ranging from transport to renewable energy.

Urban Design was funded partially from revenue budgets with other fees being generated via a Trading Account. The main areas of fee generation supporting the Trading Account came from Planning Services, Regeneration, plus Countryside & Green Space within Direct Services.

Urban Design's corporate work included servicing council wide activities and responding to Elected Member/Planning Committee. Although such activities were not fee earning they must be absorbed within the overheads which formed part of the hourly rate for fees. Management Structure and Corporate overheads also had to be included in the total fee recovery which further increased the hourly rate. The trading activity required that Urban Design not only covered its costs including overheads but also returned an operational surplus to the Council.

The Committee believed that reduced fees following a review of the trading account arrangements with a view to bringing the service into a revenue funding position could improve the competitiveness and provide a compliance service to Tees Valley Unlimited and other Local Authorities. Both TVU and other Tees Valley Authorities used a mix of temporary staff, private practices or other external agencies to assist in the delivery of their design services.

Car Parking

The car parking service was a non-statutory service. Management of public parking facilities assisted with traffic management and environmental improvements. The on-street facilities (typically those located by the kerbside) and off-street facilities (within car parks) were distributed throughout the Borough. The facilities were paid for completely by the motorist with cross subsidy of non-charging car parking spaces by charging ones currently entirely located in Stockton Town Centre. Maximum lengths of stay

restrictions were generally structured to promote short-term parking and high turnover of spaces in town centres, but a degree of long-term commuter parking permitted in the outer areas.

In 2009 Stockton Council carried out a consultation exercise asking for opinions on a range of options for the potential of improving parking in Yarm Town Centre. The Committee taking into consideration the requirements of the EIT process balanced with the Cabinet decisions following the consultation was keen to see parity across Stockton Borough wherever possible. With car parking charges payable in Stockton Town Centre it was considered inequitable not to charge in other town centres in the Borough.

The Committee was keen to ensure that any introduction of charges could be 'ring-fenced' thereby guaranteeing the positive use of raised income. Members wanted to see monies used to improve car parking services and public transport investment so as not to negatively impact on Yarm High Street.

Cabinet requested that details of existing school crossing patrols be forwarded to all Members on a ward basis, together with details of the criteria used when determining the justification for a School Crossing Patrol.

During consideration Councillor Mrs Beaumont indicated that she considered that recommendations relating to car parking should be worded in a different way and she objected to the specific references to Yarm within them.

RESOLVED that:-

Blue Badge Scheme

1. a simplified model for applying for a Blue Badge similar to that operated by other local authorities be introduced.
2. that an additional charge (initially £3) for the production of a digital photograph to be used on a Blue Badge be added to the administration charge levied.

School Crossing Patrols

3. the seven School Crossing Patrol sites identified where a puffin or pelican crossing are available or where the sites no longer meet the criteria are closed.
- 4 six further sites identified be surveyed to assess their position against criteria and are closed if appropriate.
- 5 a policy be developed to ensure S106 agreements can secure the establishment of a puffin or pelican crossing rather than introduce a School Crossing Patrol where necessary.
- 6 annual surveys be conducted at all sites to determine if they meet national criteria.
- 7 annual surveys determine the number of unaccompanied children using School Crossing Patrol sites.

Urban Design

- 8 a review be undertaken of the trading account arrangements with the intention of bringing the service into a revenue funding position.
- 9 that a review is undertaken of corporate and management overheads and requirement for operational surplus to reduce fee rates to make Urban Design even more competitive in its service delivery and compliance with Local Authority regulations for any services provided to Tees Valley Authorities.
- 10 a management review of staff roles be undertaken where there are clear synergies with those of the Countryside Team, with a view to achieving further efficiency savings.

Car Parking

- 11 further work be undertaken in order to consider the structure of car parking charges in Stockton Town Centre, which would also include Blue Badge users.
- 12 long stay car parking charges at Yarm Rail Halt be introduced.
- 13 accepts the principle of charging for car parking in Yarm and that it be introduced as part of a wider review of car parking charges across the Borough.

14 income generated by car parking charging in Yarm contribute towards the provision, maintenance and security of car parking facilities and other public transport measures.

Councillor Mrs Beaumont requested that her name be recorded as voting against resolutions 11, 12, 13 and 14.

3. Reasons for the Decision

The Council incurs a large cost for providing the Blue Badge Scheme. The streamlining of the service and providing the required photographs will assist to reduce the overall cost.

Some school crossing patrols are provided where alternative road crossing measures exist. Where appropriate this duplication is to be addressed.

The Urban Design Team has the opportunity to compete for work external to the Council but require alternative financial arrangements to be in place to be more competitive.

Car parking charges will bring Yarm in-line with other parts of Stockton Borough and will assist the development of permanent long-stay parking in Yarm. Amended car parking charges in Stockton Town Centre may help to assist the regeneration of the town centre.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

Councillor Mrs McCoy declared a personal non prejudicial interest in the item entitled EIT Review - Built and Natural Environment as she was a Trustee of Shopmobility, which had interest relating to the Blue Badge Scheme

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not applicable

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Midnight on Friday 24 December 2010

Proper Officer
21 December 2010