

## **AGENDA ITEM**

### **REPORT TO ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE**

**24 NOVEMBER 2010**

## **BUILT AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT EIT REVIEW**

### **SUMMARY**

The purpose of this report is to consider areas on which to focus upon to achieve the objectives of the EIT review of the Built and Natural Environment service and to provide a series of actions to pursue.

### **BACKGROUND**

The original scope of the EIT Review of the Built and Natural Environment Review included:-

- Blue Badge Scheme
- Penalty Charge Notices for Parking and Bus Lanes
- The operation of off-street and on-street car parking
- Permit Parking Schemes
- Road Safety Partnership
- Eco Driver Training
- Motorcycle Training
- School Crossing Patrol Service
- Urban Design and Countryside Greenspace

However, at the first meeting it was noted that the Countryside Greenspace element of the review was being covered by the Arts, Leisure and Culture Select Committee as part of their review. Areas of overlap would be considered and linkages as they developed would be examined.

Members have received reports on a number of service areas:-

- School Crossing Patrol Service
- Re-offending by speeding motorists
- Driver training for fleet drivers
- Motorcycle training
- Public Car Park charges

and received presentations on:

- Sunderland City Council approach to Blue Badge processing
- The work of the Urban Design Team

### **OPPORTUNITIES**

Four key areas have been identified for action to achieve efficiencies, an improved service and transforming areas that need to meet a changing economic climate.

#### **1 School Crossing Patrols**

Three options were considered by Members:

- (a) all current School Crossing Patrol sites are closed.
- (b) School Crossing Patrols on light controlled crossings, zebra crossing or which no longer meet the criteria are closed.
- (c) School Crossing Patrols operating on puffins, pelican crossings or which no longer meet the criteria are closed.

Whilst the responsibility for ensuring the safety of children travelling to school rests with parents it was felt that the Council should ensure that safe routes are available for children to follow. Therefore the following actions are proposed that will meet those objectives.

1. Seven sites closed where a puffin, pelican crossing are available or where the sites no longer meet the criteria. Savings £23,000.
2. Six further sites to be surveyed to assess their position against criteria. Potential maximum savings if all six fail to meet the criteria and are closed, £30,000.
3. Annual surveys are to be conducted at all sites to determine if they meet national criteria. Those that do not will be closed.

## **2 Blue Badges**

The government set the criteria to be met before an applicant can be issued a blue badge and the charge that can be levied is also set nationally at a maximum of £2. Stockton issues around 3,500 badges per annum raising £7,000 but it costs around £98,000 to process those applications. A total of 9,972 blue badges are in place in Stockton.

At the meeting on 1 November 2010 Members received a presentation from Sunderland City Council who had adopted a much streamlined approach to blue badge processing using their contact centre, an electronic form and has reduced processing time from 6 weeks to 2-3 days. They had reduced the use of occupational therapists for assessments by 95% and had opted not to collect the £2 fee as it was considered more expensive to administer the collection of this income.

The electronic pro-forma has been devised by the occupational therapy team and has received regional recognition for its approach. Stockton currently asks for a doctor's report for those applications who do not meet the automatic criteria of the higher level Disability Allowance and this costs £25 per applicant. This amounted to £59,425 in 2009/10 which is recharged to the Primary Care Trust.

Actions proposed for this service area are:

1. The Sunderland City Council model for the issue of blue badges is adopted with some adjustments to meet local needs and circumstances.

Savings are in the order of £59K for not requiring a medical certificate but this is to be attributed to the PCT (However with the demise of the PCT this may ultimately fall to SBC).

Further savings on administration of the scheme are to be calculated as part of a wider review of administration within both the car parking service and the needs of the Contact Centre.

2. The blue badge scheme is to be delivered by the Contact Centre when that is fully operational in 2011. The issue of the blue badge is to be charged at £2 with an additional £3 for the photograph to be taken digitally at the centre, making the total charge £5 and raising revenue income to around £17,500.

Additional income is to be in the order of £10,500.

### 3 Car Parking Charges

At the meeting on 4 October 2010 Members considered the charges currently in operation in short and long stay car parks in Stockton and how they compared with neighbouring authorities and privately owned car parks.

One issue that was raised is the lack of free parking for shoppers in Stockton that used to exist in the Castlegate Centre car park and concerns over the impact that charges can have on attracting shoppers to the town centre. The proposals therefore need to address the wider regeneration aspirations of the Council, the needs of shoppers, visitors and workers in the town and the need to meet costs associated with delivery of the service.

Options proposed for this service are:

1. Introduce free for two hours car parking in all short stay car parks on Saturdays with the income cost from this proposal being met by increases to the long stay car parking charges. Savings from this proposal are zero but it does support the regeneration of the town centres.
2. As for action proposed above but increase the long stay car parking charges to achieve an overall 5% revenue increase.

Additional revenue of around £xxxxx will be achieved based on 2010/11 position.

3. Introduce medium stay car parking charges in two sites in Yarm (xxxxxxxxxxx) and long stay at Yarm Rail Halt.

Additional income from this proposal would be in the order of £xxxxxx.

### 4 Urban Design Service

The Urban Design team provide a range of services that include landscape architecture, strategic design advice and input into planning applications on behalf of technical services. The remit includes the delivery of a range of projects that include playbuilder schemes, small environmental improvements, alley gates and improvements to the urban realm. Significant contributions are made to the regeneration of the borough through initiatives such as the Stockton Urban Design Guide that will shape the public realm in Stockton Town Centre.

The team operate on a trading account basis and are required to raise income through fee generation. This leads to tensions and diversion of elements of capital funding to support revenue costs. There are overlaps in the delivery of some of the projects with the work in the Countryside Team within Direct Services which are undergoing a separate EIT review.

Actions proposed for this service would be:

1. Review the trading account arrangements with a view to bringing the service into a revenue funding position.

Potential savings are to be identified through the ability to deliver more schemes from capital allocation of funding.

2. A management review of staff roles will be undertaken where there are clear synergies with those of the Countryside Team, with a view to achieving further efficiency savings.

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