

Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 16 November 2010

Comments Regarding Savings Proposals contained within the Corporate Budget Strategy Report presented to Executive on 2 November 2010

At its meeting of 16 November 2010, the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the viability and suitability of the specific savings proposals relating to the Sustainable Communities Directorate. Detailed below are the outcomes of this meeting.

Sustainable Communities Directorate

a. EG, S&R1 Reduce External Enterprise and Marketing Activity

The Committee queried whether the full £200k budget could be saved in relation to external enterprise and marketing activity. Members were informed that the £100k in funding which would remain after the proposed savings was essential to help support the creation of an additional 27,000 new jobs in Central Bedfordshire.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the proposal to reduce external enterprise and marketing activity in order to achieve £100k savings.

b. EG, S&R2 Stop Grant to Luton Gateway Local Delivery Vehicle (LDV)

The Committee asked how Central Bedfordshire Council would continue to promote economic regeneration in the absence of the Luton Gateway and discussed the other available levers to promote economic growth.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the proposal to cease the grant to Luton Gateway Local Delivery Vehicle in order to achieve £50k savings.

c. EG, S&R3 Town and Parish Planning Support Activity Stopped

The Committee was told that there were very few Town and Parish Plans still to be produced. Members discussed the plans currently under development for Houghton Regis and Sandy and were informed that if savings proposals were implemented the support to develop these would cease on 1 April 2011. Town and Parish Plans were not statutory documents and where they were considered to be necessary the local Town or Parish Council would be expected to develop these from their own resources.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the proposal to stop town and parish planning support activity in order to achieve £45k savings.

d. EG, S&R4 Mobile Library Service to be Stopped. However, Library Link will Continue to be Provided

The Committee discussed the implications of this proposal and the current cost and usage of the Library Link and Mobile Library services. Members were mindful of the ePetition received on this matter which asked the Council to

reconsider the proposed removal of the Mobile Library Service. The Committee considered the effect on users of the Mobile Library service if it was to stop.

The Committee raised various concerns relating to the accessibility of static libraries in the absence of the Mobile Library service, which would be affected by the rural nature of Central Bedfordshire. It was suggested that some residents would not be able to access static libraries and may also not meet the criteria to receive the Library Link service.

The Committee discussed the total cost per user of the Mobile Library and Library Link services and agreed that costs needed to be reduced whilst also seeking to address what Members saw as additional capacity in both services. It was suggested that a merger of these services might be more appropriate in order to utilise their benefits whilst also achieving savings.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive reconsider these proposals in order to explore an alternative combination of the services whilst avoiding cost creep and still achieving the estimated £55k savings set out in the report.

- e. EG, S&R5 Libraries Homework Centres for Five Areas to be Discontinued from 1 July 2011

The Committee was informed that the Library Homework Centres were not a statutory service and that schools and colleges might be able to support the users of this service. It was agreed that Members who were also school Governors should encourage schools to consider whether they can support users of this service.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the proposal to discontinue the Library Homework Centres for five areas from 1 July 2011 in order to achieve £30k savings.

- f. EG, S&R6 European Development Programme Fund Stopped

The Committee was told that this fund was non-statutory.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the proposal to cease the European Development Programme fund in order to achieve £20k savings.

- g. EG, S&R7 Reduction in Arts Development Service and Refocus to Support the Most Vulnerable

The Committee queried the total size of the budget for the Arts Service and the amount of funding that was attributed to Leighton Buzzard Theatre. Members commented that the proposal needed to be considered in the context of the proposed changes to the Music Service and taking into account the total size of the arts budget queried whether it may be possible to achieve a greater level of savings.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive reconsider these proposals to seek further options for reducing funding to the Arts Service by a greater extent than the £65k identified in the report in the context of the £450k total budget.

h. HT1 Replace Illuminated Bollards with Reflective Ones and Turn Off Street Lighting Between 2400 and 0600 Daily

The Committee raised no objection to the use of reflective bollards but expressed concerns relating to the turning off or dimming of street lighting and the impact this would have on the effectiveness of CCTV. It was felt that due regard needed to be given to public safety and interested parties should be consulted locally before the proposal was implemented.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive:

- 1. adopt the proposals to replace illuminated bollards with reflective ones in order to achieve the proposed savings; and**
- 2. adopt the proposals to turn off or dim street lighting between 2400 hours and 0600 hours daily in order to achieve the proposed savings having due regard to public safety and having first undertaken consultation with interested parties locally before the lights are switched off or dimmed.**

i. HT4 Cease Support for the Provision of School Crossing Patrols

The Committee discussed concerns relating to the removal of school crossing patrols at schools where there were no urban design measures, such as pedestrian crossing, to improve safety. The Committee stressed the importance of health and safety and ensuring that children and young people were safe whilst walking to school. Where a patrol had been put in place on road safety grounds the Council should seek alternatives to ensure these patrols remained, including the schools taking responsibility for funding.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive seek to transfer the support for the provision of school crossing patrols to schools wherever possible. Where schools were not able to support the provision of the patrol the Council should seek to implement pedestrian crossings where they do not already exist and only remove the patrol following a safety audit indicating that it was felt safe to do so.

j. CSPPW3 Community Safety Team

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the proposal to reduce the number of posts in the Community Safety Team in order to achieve an estimated £90k savings.

k. CSPPW4 Closed Circuit Television Surveillance System (CCTV) Reduced Monitoring, Reduction of CCTV Operator Posts and Changes to Terms and Conditions

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the proposal to reduce monitoring, reduce CCTV operator posts and change terms and conditions in order to achieve an estimated £95k savings.

l. CSPPW5 Waste and Street Cleansing: Rationalise a Range of Waste Services

Rationalise Fly Tip Resource

The Committee discussed the use of tidy tips and asked if their use and that of PREEN could be extended. The Portfolio Holder was asked to consider schemes similar to that which had been in operation in Milton Keynes as a means of reducing the level of fly tipping.

Street Cleansing in the South

The Committee noted that this was currently a very high performing service. The Committee accepted that street cleansing standards may be impacted by the proposals but accepted this on the grounds that a reasonable standard would be maintained in the town centres.

Household Waste Recycling Area

The Committee discussed the operating hours of the Household Waste Recycling Centres and accepted that these services should be rationalised. Members stressed it was important that the Centres remain open at weekends and at other times where usage was at its highest.

Food Waste Collection

Members commented that several residents had complained about the proposal to cease the supply of biodegradable bags for use with the scheme. It was also commented that this proposal would have a negative 20% impact on recycling targets.

The Committee requested that if the Council ceased to supply biodegradable bags residents should be made aware of where they can be purchased. Residents should also be made aware that food waste could be wrapped in newspaper.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the proposal to rationalise a range of waste and street cleansing services in order to achieve approximately £400k savings.

m. CSPPWL6 Biggleswade Recreation Centre

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the proposal to reduce the service at Biggleswade Recreation Centre in order to achieve approximately £65k savings.

n. CSPPWL7 Clouse of Leisure Centre – Houghton Regis Leisure Centre

The Committee discussed the age of the facility and the necessary investment to raise it to standard. Members were mindful of the ePetition received on this matter which asked the Council to keep the Leisure Centre open until a new facility was provided in the town. It was noted that two paper based petitions in support of the Leisure Centre's retention were also in circulation.

Members queried whether an alternative provider could be sought to continue operation of Houghton Regis Leisure Centre beyond 2011. The Portfolio Holder provided an undertaking that he would seek to discuss alternatives with other providers before the proposed closure in December 2011.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the proposal to close Houghton Regis Leisure Centre in order to achieve approximately £172k savings and that the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities and Healthier Lifestyles discuss with alternative providers how the facility could be retained post December 2011.

o. P1 Housing Strategy and Support for new Affordable Housing Provision

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the proposal to reduce support for the Housing Strategy and support for new affordable housing provision in order to achieve £67k savings.

p. P2 Sustainable Growth Advice and Support

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the proposal to reduce the level of sustainable growth advice and support in order to achieve £35k savings.

q. P6 Reduction in Small Grants/ Commissions

The Committee queried whether there were other fiscally neutral proposals that had been considered to maintain the Marston Vale Trust and whether the Council could match the £10k funding proposed to be contributed by Bedford Borough Council.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the proposal to reduce CBCs £25k contribution towards the core resource costs of the Trust. Having adopted the proposal the Executive should seek to provide fiscally neutral support to the Marston Vale Trust.

r. P10 Countryside Services Restructure

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the proposal to restructure Countryside Services in order to achieve £145k savings.

s. P11 Reduction in Transport Strategy Team Resource and Transport Surveys Reduced from Six Monthly to Annual

RECOMMENDED that the Executive adopt the proposal to reduce the Transport Strategy Team resource and produce transport surveys annually in order to achieve £60k savings.