

ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD COMMITTEE

17 September 2015 at 7.30 pm

MEMBERS: Councillor Jill Whitehead (Chair), Councillor Nighat Piracha (Vice Chair) and Councillors Manuel Abellan, Adrian Davey, Richard Marston, Patrick McManus, Steve Penneck, Tony Shields, Paul Wingfield and Hanna Zuchowska.
(*Absent) Councillor Ruth Dombey (ex-officio).

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATIONS OF SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Patrick McManus and Richard Marston. Councillors Tim Crowley and Jean Crossby attended as substitutes.

11. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2015 be agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor Steve Penneck declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 5 on the agenda.

13. LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN - BID

The Committee considered a report on the Council's Local Implementation Plan submission to the Transport for London for funding for 2016/17. The submission had been considered and agreed by all the Local Committees. Transport for London would consider the submitted proposals before negotiating and agreeing the London Borough of Sutton's final allocation.

RESOLVED: That the draft list of proposals, contained within appendix A of the report, including the statement of need, be agreed as Sutton's submission to Transport for London for Local Implementation Plan funding in 2016/17.

14. INTER AUTHORITY AGREEMENT (IAA) WITH SOUTH LONDON WASTE PARTNERSHIP

This report was introduced by the Acting Executive Head of Environment Commissioning. The Committee considered a report on a new Inter Authority Agreement for the procurement of services currently being conducted by the South London Waste Partnership, including environmental services, street cleaning, fleet management and parks, including grounds maintenance and associated services.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Inter Authority Agreement relating to the environmental services procurement be agreed.
2. That the governance arrangements for de-selection of bidders, as set in paragraph 4.6 of the report, be agreed.

15. WALLINGTON PUBLIC HALL - OPTIONS

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The report was introduced by the Executive Head of Safer and Stronger Communities, which proposed retaining 40 parking spaces to meet current and future demand. It was pointed out that the recommendation was to agree the closure of the car park, not the disposal of it, which fell within the remit of the Strategy and Resources Committee. One Councillor was concerned that the reduction of parking spaces could lead to overspill parking in nearby residential areas. Data from a parking survey commissioned by the Council showed that this car park had been underused, and that existing car parks in Wallington had sufficient capacity to accommodate existing demand.

A vote was taken; 8 were in favour and Councillors Tim Crowley and Tony Shields abstained from voting. It was therefore:

RESOLVED: That Wallington Public Hall car park be part closed, retaining 40 spaces to meet current and future demand.

16. PARKING STRATEGY REVIEW

The Committee considered a report on the implementation of a five year parking strategy and associated programme of works, to incorporate minor parking scheme requests and the review of existing controlled parking zones and pricing.

The Head of Highways and Transport noted that the aim of introducing the strategy was to provide a more cohesive, borough wide approach to parking and a more intelligent approach to enforcement. The revised strategy would also align with the Local Plan and take into account future developments in the borough. The review would cover both on street and off street parking arrangements, and examine the effectiveness of CPZ, looking at a range of possible solutions.

In response to Councillors' comments on residents' concerns about parking in their wards, the Head of Highways and Transport outlined the intention to improve engagement with residents, in order to gather information on areas of parking stress in the borough. A key part of the review would be to examine "attractors" and "generators" of parking and this would include looking at parking "hot spots" such as areas around High Streets, bus and rail stations, schools, nurseries and colleges, hospitals, and new developments.

Specific local issues would be discussed as part of the engagement sessions with councillors for each Local Committee area, and these had already started.

RESOLVED:

1. That a revised Parking Strategy, including a Pricing Strategy, be developed and presented to the Environment and Neighbourhood Committee for consideration on 4 February 2016.
2. That the Council move to a borough wide approach to minor and major parking scheme management, based on a five year programme, supported by an annually reviewed schedule of work.
3. That the current application of Local Implementation Plan funding through Local Committees be restructured and reallocate to support the new programme.

4. To note that additional capital funding will be necessary to support these recommendations, and that this is to be applied for through the approved corporate process.
5. That on and off street parking charges be removed from the annual corporate inflationary fees and charges review and implement a demand driven pricing model utilising existing delegated authority.

17. THE FUTURE OF SUTTON'S LIBRARY SERVICE: OPTIONS FOR SAVINGS AND PERMISSION TO CONSULT

The report was introduced by the Executive Head of Wellbeing, the Head of Libraries, Heritage and Arts and the Temporary Executive Head of Communities and Neighbourhoods.

The Committee considered the options for the library service to achieve a savings target of circa £1million by 2018/19 from an annual budget of £4.4m, whilst remaining within the remits of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, delivering an excellent service and developing a financially sustainable network which is compliant with the Council's public sector equality duty.

In response to a question, the former temporary Executive Head of Communities and Neighbourhoods advised that the 151 Public Library Authorities across the country had taken a variety of approaches but it was challenging for them to make the appropriate savings. Whilst some had trialled using volunteers or handed over libraries to voluntary groups, some were being operated via social enterprises. The Circle Library was mentioned as an example of a Council run library that involved the local community. The Council would be looking at volunteer supported community models, shared services, and commissioned or outsourced library services as part of its research.

A discussion ensued on some of the issues surrounding future models for libraries. In regard to volunteers in libraries, the former temporary Executive Head of Communities and Neighbourhoods explained that any volunteers must be of high quality and rigorously trained to ensure the quality of service remains consistent.

Members encouraged officers to ensure that young people are consulted as part of the process, and the importance of the consultation being representative of all people in the borough. In addition to the recommendations contained within the report, it was moved by Councillor Adrian Davey and seconded by Councillor Steve Penneck that: "The Equality and Diversity Forum be included in the programme of consultation detailed within Appendix A to the report".

Opposition members expressed concern about the possible loss of the mobile library, particularly for residents in Clockhouse where public transport links were less regular than in other part of the borough, and for elderly and vulnerable residents in Sutton South ward. They also expressed concerns about the possible closure of Beddington Library, given the potential closure of the children's centre in Beddington as well.

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In response, officers explained that the consultation will take into account all libraries across the borough and will look at what each service delivers to the user. With regard to Beddington Library, the Executive Head of Wellbeing pointed out that use had declined by 78% over the last seven years, and the detailed Library Profile statistics drawn up showed that Beddington library did not score highly compared to other libraries. Councils were required to provide detailed evidence of usage and catchment area demographics in support of their proposals. Users of Beddington Library were more likely to use other libraries also (48% of Beddington Library members used other libraries).

The mobile library service was expensive and its use had declined by 32% over the last five years. Also 37% of its users visited other libraries. Only three councils in London still maintained such provision. In recognition of vulnerable customers, the existing housebound service will be improved and expanded, and will be offered in partnership with the Meals on wheels service and Sutton's Old People's Welfare Committee via volunteers.

A vote was taken on all three recommendations. Eight members voted in favour and two members voted against (Councillors Tim Crowley and Tony Shields). It was therefore:

RESOLVED:

1. That a programme for consultation with staff, customers, stakeholders and partners on the future provision of the library service in Sutton, in line with the Council's statutory responsibility under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 be undertaken.
2. That the consultation methodology and programme, as attached at Appendix A of the report, be agreed.
3. The Equality and Diversity Forum be included in the programme of consultation detailed within Appendix A to the report.

18. SUTTON LIFE CENTRE: REVIEW BY EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS AND NEXT STEPS

This report was presented to the Committee by the Executive Head of Safer and Stronger Communities and the former temporary Executive Head of Communities and Neighbourhoods. The report outlined the results of a review of the Life Centre by Red Quadrant and Sports, Leisure and Culture Consultancy, which concluded that there was no single solution or commercial proposition that could improve the financial performance and utilisation of the Life Centre. In their view, there was a number of smaller scale, achievable options which would improve the viability of the centre.

The Chair noted that an addendum to the report had been tabled which provided updated legal advice.

The Committee had an extensive debate on the issues contained within the report and on the three options presented in paragraphs 7.2 – 7.4 and discussed in depth the best way forward for the Life Centre.

Option 1 proposed closing down the Life Centre and disposing of the building, but this would entail paying back the MyPlace grant of £4.1m, with mothballing costs and constraints about future use of the site.

Option 2 proposed transferring the Life Centre to another provider, retaining the library. This option had been investigated and discussed with potential providers. But there would be capital costs of £2m to convert the building, and if the potential future use did not meet the MyPlace criteria, the grant of £4.1 m would have to be paid back. This option could be possible in future if a party came forward that met the MyPlace criteria.

Option 3 proposed continuing the Life Centre but under a revised commercial operating model, including making staff savings of £100,000 pa., increased marketing and letting the café. The Centre would be given an income target to achieve within two years, and be required to generate new income and make bids for external revenue funding. This would be within the terms of the Cabinet Office's MyPlace funding.

The Leader of the Opposition suggested that officers and members should increase efforts to engage with the Cabinet Office, to change the terms and conditions of the My Place funding agreement, in order to develop the Life Centre into community benefit. The Executive Head of Safer and Stronger Communities described the discussions he had had with the Cabinet Office and advised the Committee on the formal process to be followed if the Council wished to propose a change of use for the Life Centre. He outlined the Cabinet Office's desire to protect services to young people, and to support the principles underpinning the My Place agreement, but confirmed that the centre could be used to provide services for other groups, as long as they do not compromise the provision of services to young people.

It was moved by Councillor Steve Penneck, seconded by Councillor Adrian Davey and

RESOLVED:

1. That officers take forward Option 3 as set out in paragraph 7.4 of the report, to continue operations under a revised operating model, with a view to reducing cost and increasing income to work towards full cost recovery from all elements of the Life Centre, except for the library, as far as possible.
2. That officers and Members continue to lobby the Cabinet Office regarding the terms and conditions of the My Place funding agreement.
3. That options for the transfer of the asset also continue to be explored.

19. ANY URGENT ITEMS BROUGHT FORWARD AT THE DIRECTION OF THE CHAIR

There were no urgent items.

The meeting ended at 9.35 pm

Chair:

Date: