



Overview and Scrutiny Committee Minutes

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of Wyre Borough Council held on Monday, 6 November 2017 at the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Poulton-le-Fylde.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee members present:

Councillors Rita Amos, Colette Birch, Emma Ellison, Rob Fail, John Hodgkinson, John Ibison, Patsy Ormrod, Julie Robinson, Christine Smith, Matthew Vincent and Michael Vincent

Other councillors present:

Councillor Lady Atkins

Officers present:

Clare James, Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer
Peter Foulsham, Scrutiny Officer

OS.33 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors I Amos, E Anderton and Jones.

OS.34 Declarations of interest

None.

OS.35 Confirmation of minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 9 October 2017 be confirmed as a correct record

OS.36 Review of fees and charges 2018/19

Clare James, Head of Finance, presented a report. She reminded members that fees and charges can be changed at any time but it has been recent practice to try to deal with everything in one report once a year, as far as possible.

Ms James drew members' attention to six paragraphs in particular.

5.1.2 There was a minor change in that the fees were now £190.52 and £177.15 respectively. Food Safety officers historically re-inspected premises free of charge. Every premise had to be inspected every three years with extra inspections being inspected when a business felt confident that their rating would go up and they did not want to wait until their scheduled inspection.

5.2.1 Following the appointment of a new Commercial Manager, Julia Robinson, there were some proposed adjustments to commercial and non-commercial fees and charges. A cross-directorate working group had been set up to look at weddings and to draw together the different offers at the theatres and the Civic Centre. The subsidy to Marine Hall had hovered between £225K to £250K for the last three years and the council needed to drive this down and be more commercial without alienating our community groups. Lots of work had been undertaken with community hirers to ensure adequate consultation had taken place and the venues could become more sustainable over time.

5.4.3 There was recognition that footfall had reduced at Fleetwood Market over a number of years and two new incentives were being introduced to try and encourage food stalls as this was a significant gap in the current offer at the market, compared to other similar facilities. The opening of a Digital Hub in conjunction with the CAB was hoped will bring in more customers to the market and both Julia Robinson and Marianne Hesketh were exploring other opportunities to reinvigorate the market as it was regarded as a key asset for the council and the community.

5.4.5 Approval for the test centre and a £40 MOT fee was received in March 2017. The additional £20 charge for taxi testing had been included in order to support the option of bringing it back in house when the current contract ended, although no decision had yet been made.

5.5.5 Credit and Debit Card surcharge fees would become illegal in January 2018 and would therefore cease.

5.6.8 There used to be some inconsistency across the council between cemeteries and other departments with regard to charges for memorial benches and plaques. This was now being standardised with the aim of ensuring that any 'donation' reflected the cost to the council of installing and maintaining the bench.

Following discussion, councillors raised a number of points which would be taken up by officers.

RESOLVED that

- (i) Ms James be thanked for attending the meeting and for her very informative report,

- (ii) The report be noted, subject to the questions raised by members being followed up by officers.

OS.37 Cost profiles - benchmarking results 2017/18

Clare James, Head of Finance, presented a report.

Ms James explained that this report was produced annually and was intended to help officers and members identify areas for potential scrutiny review.

The report summarised information submitted to central government by the council and compared the council's performance against other councils in our Nearest Neighbours Group. The Nearest Neighbours Group included authorities with similar characteristics to Wyre, so many were coastal, relatively small, second-tier authorities that carried out similar activities.

Ms James highlighted several points arising from the report. The total expenditure per head in Wyre had reduced from £114.66 in 2016/17 to £111.14 (roughly 3%) in 17/18, which was in line with the continued reduction in central government funding. There had also been a small reduction in Wyre's population of around 200 people.

Three of the categories of spend had reduced and three had increased in cost per unit, namely Highways and Transport, Planning and Cultural and Related Services.

The main areas that appeared to be suitable for further investigation were:

Car parking fees and charges
Care and Repair/ handy person service
Tourism/marketing/events

Cross-directorate officer working groups were in the process of being set up to review these areas further. A four-week consultation on parking charges was due to begin on 15 November 2017.

Councillors made the following additional comments:

- There were lots of anomalies with car parking charges and a borough-wide review was to be welcomed
- The question of charging points for electric vehicles needed to be addressed
- The committee would like the opportunity to comment on the consultation results before any proposed car parking policy was implemented
- The residents car parking permit scheme needed fundamental and urgent review
- The committee would like to receive quarterly progress reports about the delivery of the car parking strategy and any subsequent policy changes
- It was currently unclear how officer productivity was assessed

- The maintenance of un-adopted roads was a concern; to what extent was the council maintaining roads for which it had no responsibility?
- Councillors would like to know more about the detail of the agreement with Lancashire County Council regarding the maintenance of roundabouts
- The subsidy on assets such as the Marine Hall needed to be driven down and the committee informed about progress. It was noted that this will be an item considered by the committee on 8 January 2018.

RESOLVED that

- (i) Clare James be thanked for her informative report
- (ii) A report on the outcome of the car parking consultation be submitted to the committee as soon as it was available
- (iii) Quarterly reports on the progress and implementation of the car parking strategy be submitted to the committee, commencing in February 2018
- (iv) Clarification about the council's role in the maintenance of un-adopted roads be provided to the committee
- (v) Information about the agreement with Lancashire County Council regarding the maintenance of roundabouts be provided to the committee

OS.38 Life in Wyre task group - draft report

Councillor Christine Smith, Chairman of the task group, introduced the group's draft report and recommendations, which had been discussed and supported recently by the portfolio holder.

RESOLVED that the report and recommendations be endorsed by the committee.

OS.39 Council tax discounts and exemptions for the severely mentally impaired (SMI)

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

OS.40 Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2017-18

The Chairman, Councillor Michael Vincent, updated members about the progress of the current task groups. He also reminded members that following their consideration on 8 January 2018 of a report on how the council might maximise its return from its assets, it was likely that at least one new task group review would be identified.

OS.41 Date and time of next meeting

RESOLVED that the next meeting of the committee be held at 6pm on Monday 8 January 2018 at the Civic Centre, Poulton-le-Fylde.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and finished at 7.27 pm.