

FINANCE & ENTERPRISE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance & Enterprise Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 28 November 2018 at 6.00pm in Meeting Rooms G3/4 Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford

Present: Councillors N A England (Chair), N A Dugmore, R J Sloan, C F Smith and D G Wright; Co-optees: Mrs C Mason-Morris and Mr R Williams

Also Present: Councillor J M Seymour (Customer, Community & Partnership Scrutiny Committee)

In Attendance: A Astley (Assistant Director: Customer & Neighbourhood Services) and D Moseley (Democratic & Scrutiny Services Team Leader)

FESC-01 Apologies for Absence

Councillor K S Sahota

From Customer, Community and Partnership Scrutiny Committee:- Councillors G C W Reynolds, B D Tillotson and Mr D Johnson (co-optee).

FESC-02 Declarations of Interest

None.

FESC-03 Minutes

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meetings of the Finance & Enterprise Scrutiny Committee held on 15 and 23 January 2018 be confirmed and signed by the Chair

FESC-04 Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE)

The Assistant Director: Customer & Neighbourhood Services reminded Members that CPE was the transfer of powers from the Police to local authorities for enforcing parking contraventions, moving from a criminal matter to a civil matter, by way of the issue of Fixed Penalty Notices. The transfer of powers occurred through an application to the Department of Transport under the Traffic Management Act 2004. CPE only applied to on-street parking, eg parking on double yellow lines, parking in disabled bays without a valid blue badge, parking in limited and no waiting areas, or in keep clear zones. Free Council car parks would remain free to use.

Since the last meeting of the Committee, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) had provided written confirmation that he would provide transitional funding of £200,000 over four years on the agreement that the Council would apply for CPE powers by the end of 2018. The Council was clear that it did not want a model

where enforcement officers were chasing income targets to cover the cost of the scheme and that any income received from the scheme would be ring-fenced initially to pay for the operating costs and if any surplus were made would go into maintaining free car parking or developing sustainable travel initiatives.

On receipt of the guarantee of funding, the Cabinet had resolved to commence with the business case process to apply to the Department of Transport (DfT) to adopt CPE Powers. Officers had since been focussed on complying with the rules of the application, a big part of which was a public consultation. Members had been informed when the consultation began in September 2018. The consultation had focussed on improving understanding of CPE would work and to gain the public's feedback about illegal parking issues across the borough. The online questionnaire had focussed on disabled parking, school parking, pavement parking, permits and business waivers for drop offs/deliveries. 1002 survey responses had been received with 957 (96%) being completed by local residents or businesses. Whilst the responses were still being interpreted, initial data demonstrated that 78% of respondees had experienced bad or poor parking outside schools and 82% had found pavement parking to be a problem. The data suggested that it was appropriate and right for the Council to apply to take over parking enforcement.

Discussion had taken place with the Cabinet Member relating to enforcement models and it was confirmed that it was intended to use an in-house team. It was felt that outsourcing the work to the private sector would result in a culture of chasing income targets whereas an in-house team would allow the right culture to be adopted and would take an education first approach with enforcement as the last resort. Adopting a Neighbourhood Warden/Enforcement Officer model whereby an officer would have parking enforcement powers alongside other powers to address Anti Social Behaviour such as fly tipping, abandoned vehicles, and other environmental crime.

A benchmarking exercise with other authorities on the number of officers required to operate, suggested that the Council start with five officers based on geography and the other factors shared at previous meetings of the Committee. It was believed that this figure would provide the level of cover required but if it was subsequently considered insufficient, the business model could be revisited following a few years of operational experience.

Conversations are taking place with Town and Parish Councils over the next 12 months to explore opportunities for 'buy in' to the service in the event that Town and/or Parish Councils felt that a greater presence was required in their area. At the current time, a number of Town and Parish Councils had bought into the Police model (ie provided funding for Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) with criminal parking enforcement powers) and those Town and Parish Councils would be asked to transfer the funding to the council when the Police powers ceased.

There would be a transitional period when the Council was recruiting to the enforcement posts that the Police would continue to enforce.

It was unlikely that the DfT would consider the application until Autumn 2019 due to the impact of Brexit as government have said their resources were focussed on those challenges.

It was emphasised that CPE would not be a money making scheme.

Police resources were such that their efforts were being diverted to serious and organised crime, with parking enforcement being of low priority. However, the community were keen to address the issue.

The business model assumes a very low number of tickets would be issued in the first few years of operation as the main thrust of the model would be to create behavioural change. By law any money that was generated by the scheme had to be reinvested to cover the cost of the scheme and then towards highways or transport, for example to maintain free parking or to improve a sustainable transport offer through the provision of electric vehicle charging.

A lot of work had been undertaken towards the process and the next steps would be a report to Cabinet on 3 January 2019 which would contain the financial modelling, outcome of the consultation and the type of role that would be created by the in-house service. Assuming that Cabinet accepted the recommendations, the Council would submit its application to the DfT in early January. From February onwards, the Council would then engage in a full review of Traffic Regulation Orders across the borough so that all signage and road markings were correct before going live.

Members thanked the Assistant Director for a comprehensive report, asked a number of questions and made comment as follows.

Some Members considered that the consultation response rate was low and asked how widely it had been publicised.

The consultation had been carried out in accordance with normal practice, having been publicised on social media and via a press release which had received coverage in the Shropshire Star. The response was not considered to be a poor level of engagement for this type of survey.

Some Members considered that Town and Parish Councils would lose the current police presence and, taking into consideration the impact of holiday and sickness, there would be a limited Enforcement Officer presence in some areas.

Reassurance was provided that the recommended number of officers required to support the scheme had been arrived at following benchmarking exercises; these officers would join the wider enforcement team and there would, therefore, be a level of cover provided borough wide. Key hotspots would be identified and a rota for tackling these areas would be set up. If it transpired that five officers was insufficient to support the scheme, then consideration could be given to whether the model could cope with additional numbers.

What areas had been involved in benchmarking?

This information had been presented to a previous meeting and the Assistant Director was happy to recirculate the list of authorities benchmarked.

The Wrekin was an important tourist attraction but Little Wenlock Parish Council's precept was too small to allow it to support the scheme. What assurances could be given that there would be weekend and bank holiday enforcement?

The recommended model was a 7 days per week model which would make sure that a level of coverage was provided and intelligence would be used to understand where the challenges were to ensure resource was effectively applied.

What would happen after the first four years when the PCC's funding ended?

The PCC's initial funding would underwrite any initial financial risks in the scheme but after a couple of years there would be a greater understanding and, as enforcement would still be delivered just in a different way, the Town and Parish Councils who signed partnership deals their funding would be included. It was not intended that there would be a longer term burden to the tax payer.

Enforcement Officers would be civilian employees – would they have bodycams?

Yes – enforcement officers for highways and enviro-crime will be equipped with body cams.

What guarantees were there that Telford & Wrekin would not lose PCSOs as a result of the PCC funding?

This was a matter for the PCC. However, it was not believed the PCC was making savings through this funding and the Assistant Director was not aware of any planned reduction to PCSOs.

What was the projected cost for the proposed model and how did that compare with other models?

The model that was previously considered by the Committee had resulted in the PCC agreeing to plug the deficit. Modelling detail would be in the Cabinet report. The Council already had an established enforcement team so some of the detail relating to back office figures was already in place.

When would the changing of road signs and markings start and how much would this cost?

This would come out of existing highways budgets as a refresh had been required. Work was planned between February and July/August although it was acknowledged that some external assistance with the project may be needed.

Some Members suspected that it was unlikely that the DfT would consider the application before Spring 2020 but they should be urged to do it as soon as possible.

It was suspected that the DfT were managing expectations. Recruitment would take place once the green light had been received.

Had any consideration been given in the business model to using Automatic Number Plate Recognition around schools?

This had not been considered in the business model. However, if this technology did have a part to play in the future it would be subject to financial investment and planning permission.

Some Members welcomed the PCC's £200,000 funding and noted that the car population was growing resulting in an impact on pedestrians, particularly the disabled and those with pushchairs. Many Members expressed support for the in-house model which would retain control to educate the population prior to enforcement action.

With the exception of Mrs C Mason-Morris (who registered an abstention as she considered that further engagement was needed with Town and Parish Councils), Members were unanimously in support of the Council making the application without delay as the long application process gave sufficient time to engage in dialogue with the Town and Parish Councils.

Members agreed that Scrutiny should monitor the scheme two years post-implementation.

RESOLVED – that the Committee support the making of an application to take over Civil Parking Enforcement powers and that Scrutiny monitor implementation after a two year period.

FESC-05 Work Programme 2018/19

The Chair referred Members to the Terms of Reference for the Committee set out at Appendix 1 to the report, which had been endorsed by Scrutiny Management Board and no changes were recommended. Members accepted the content.

The Chair referred Members to the suggestions shown in Appendix 2 to the report which had been referred to the Committee by Scrutiny Management Board to decide which issues should be included in the Committee's Work Programme. Two items were detailed: Civil Parking Enforcement and Budget Scrutiny. It was suggested that Scrutiny should consider the impact of Brexit on the Council and the Council's resilience to deal with Brexit and any mitigation required. It was agreed that this suggestion would be put forward to Scrutiny Management Board.

Scrutiny Management Board had also allocated a baseline of four formal meetings to each Scrutiny Committee to carry out the work programme.

RESOLVED – that

- (a) the Terms of Reference set out at Appendix 1 to the report be agreed;
- (b) the Committee's work programme for 2018/19 as set out at Appendix 2 be agreed; and

- (c) the dates of future meetings as set out in the draft work programme be noted
- (d) the suggestion to scrutinise the impact of Brexit on the Council be referred to Scrutiny Management Board for consideration.

The meeting ended at 6.55pm

Chairman:

Date: