

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY 1 DECEMBER 2011 AT 10.00 AM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Rutherford (Chairman), Councillors Bowditch, Craig, Mrs Farmer, McDevitt, Mrs Vasey and Watson

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor Bloxham – Environment and Housing Portfolio Holder
Councillor Mrs Bowman – Economic Development Portfolio Holder

EEOSP.69/11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs Robson

EEOSP.70/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest affecting the business to be transacted at the meeting.

EEOSP.71/11 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – 1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2011 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

2.) That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2011 be noted.

EEOSP.72/11 CALL IN OF DECISIONS

There were no matters that had been the subject of call in.

EEOSP.73/11 – CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman advised the Panel that item A.2 on the agenda – Car Parking Study – would be considered following the presentation in Part B.

A Member stated that he was disappointed that the Members of the Executive and Officers would have to leave the meeting early to attend another meeting. The Portfolio Holder explained that the arranging of the meeting was outwith the control of the Executive Members and that previous clashes were with a meeting that was scheduled in the Civic calendar.

The Chairman advised that item A.6 on the agenda – Environmental Performance of the Council – would be taken before item A.5 – Corporate Plan: Mid Year Performance to better facilitate Officer time.

EEOSP.74/11 CAR PARKING STUDY

The Assistant Director (Local Environment) (Ms Culleton) presented report LE.27/11 that considered the results of the Car Parking Study. The report was considered as an addendum to the Local Environment Charging Report and included a new car parking charging structure approved by Executive on 22 November 2011.

The study had confirmed the decline in off-street parking revenues and estimated that there would be a shortfall in Pay and Display ticket sales as well as contract revenues. The study considered a number of questions concerning the division of long and short stay car parking demand, opportunities for alternative use for under-utilised parking space, the impact of alternative methods of charging, new technologies, tariff structure modifications and alternative tariffs for special events. The study also considered whether tariffs were sufficiently flexible to encourage maximum demand, whether parking services were sufficiently differentiated to help maximise revenues when appropriate, whether parking operations were sufficiently responsive to the private sector, whether car park demand was impacted by alternative parking opportunities and whether the quality of parking services could be improved.

The Assistant Director (Local Environment) stated that the Council's key objective was to provide a parking service that met the needs and aspirations of the local community. It was suggested, for reasons outlined within the report, that the tariff setting be disengaged from the Medium Term Financial Plan and realigned with the current parking market. It was believed that that would help to promote and achieve other stated objectives for parking policy and therefore bring about other benefits for the City. It was proposed that tactical pricing to attract a greater proportion of long stay parking could be the way forward. It was felt that commuter parkers were likely to continue to use a car park daily when it was felt to meet their requirements and expectations of reasonable cost. An increase in the number of contract parkers would also inherently mean that a degree of customer loyalty had been achieved for the Council's car park over the duration of the contract. It was felt that that approach was aligned with the current parking policy to encourage commuters to use the main access route car parks, rather than head into the City to seek out alternative parking.

As there were factors to be taken into consideration that would be part of the presentation to be delivered later in the meeting it was agreed that consideration of the car parking study would be made at that point.

A Member raised concerns that the study would not be discussed in public and questioned the Council's purpose for the car parks. The Chairman assured the Member that the decisions would be made public. A Member suggested that a PR statement could be released informing the public of the discussion that had taken place and the decisions reached.

EEOSP.75/11 BUDGET

Revenue Budget Reports

(a) Summary of New Revenue Spending Pressures

The Assistant Director (Resources) (Mr Mason) submitted report RD.64/11 that summarised the new revenue spending pressures and reduced income projections that would need to be considered as part of the 2012/2013 budget process.

The Executive had, on 22 November 2011 (EX.146/11), received the report and decided:

“That Report RD.64/11 on the new revenue spending pressures be received and forwarded to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panels for consideration as part of the 2012/13 budget consultation process.”

Members then considered the new pressures which fell within the remit of the Panel and raised the following comments and questions:

- *The shortfall in Development Control charges could be due to less planning applications being submitted. Was there any flexibility with regard to setting charges?*

The Assistant Director (Economic Development) (Mrs Meek) advised that the figures were set nationally and there was no legislation for Local Authorities to set their own charges although that issue was currently under debate and it may be possible to lobby in that respect.

- *Members expressed their respect for the staff within the Development Control department who held a wealth of knowledge.*

RESOLVED: 1. That report RD.64/11 be noted.

2. That Officers and Members lobby Government to enable Local Authorities to set their own charges in respect of Development Control.

(b) Summary of Savings Delivered and New Proposals

Report RD.65/11 had been circulated to the Panel by way of background information.

The Executive had, on 22 November 2011 (EX.147/11), received the report and decided:

“1. That the proposed reduction to the base budget from 2012/13 onwards, as set out in Report RD.65/11, be received and forwarded to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panels for consideration as part of the budget consultation process.

2. That it be noted that the Senior Management Team would continue to investigate efficiencies and savings in accordance with the Transformational Savings Strategy.”

Mr Mason advised that the Senior Management Team had undertaken a savings review that challenged, prioritised and reviewed current base budgets. Recommendations from the review were submitted to the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Panels. The results of the review indicated that, in order to achieve a balanced budget for 2013/2013 to 2016/2017, additional transformation savings would have to be identified in order to address the identified budget pressures as detailed within report RD.64/11. At present the level of those additional savings was anticipated to be £200,000 recurring savings but that would depend upon which budget pressures and additional income proposals were supported by Members. Recruitment advertising and non-staffing reductions had been identified as additional recurring savings from the 2011/2012 budget monitoring process. Carry forwards of £80,000 had also been identified as not being required and so could be taken as a saving in 2012/2013.

In response to a query from a Member Mr Mason explained that there were several packages within the Asset Management Business Plan and that some of the assets would generate a saving.

Mr Mason advised that Phase 1 of the review was complete and that Phase 2 was currently underway. The Chairman confirmed that a review of the report would be presented to a future meeting of the Members of the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel and would be available to all Members.

RESOLVED: That report RD.65/11 be noted.

(c) Summary of Charges Review

• Local Environment – LE.23/11

Mr Mason submitted report LE.23/11 that set out the proposed fees and charges for 2012/2013 relating to those services that fell within the responsibility of the Local Environment Directorate.

The Executive had, on 22 November 2011 (EX.141/11), received the report and decided that the Executive:

“1. agreed for consultation the proposed charges, as set out in Report LE.23/11, relevant Appendices and the Addendum; and noted the impact of those charges on income generation, as detailed within the report. (The Executive would agree an implementation date at their December 2011 meeting.)

2. granted delegated responsibility to the Assistant Director (Local Environment), in consultation with the Environment and Housing Portfolio Holder, for making any changes to the charges set out for the use of parks and green spaces and to have the Scheme of Delegation amended accordingly.”

City Centre Events Charges – In view of the current economic climate it was proposed to retain the current charge levels to help maintain demand and the current budgeted level of revenue.

- *There had been a fall-off of events coming forward. Could that be improved by further marketing or publicity?*

The Strategic Director (Mr Crossley) advised that all Officers involved in events had met with regard to events to be held during the current year and the next to enable a better understanding of spending in relation to events. Discussions would be held with the Portfolio Holder and a report would be submitted in due course.

- *Would the proposed charges be used towards clean up and reinstatement costs? If not would it be possible to increase the charges to participants?*

The Assistant Director (Local Environment) (Ms Culleton) advised that the City Centre Manager discussed those issues with events holders and that the charges included a general contribution to the costs of the City Council to stage those events.

- *A Member stated that he would prefer to see specific charges for events with regard to street cleaning, etc.*

The Environment and Housing Portfolio Holder stated that as people resided in the City Centre it was important to draw a balance between their living conditions and holding events.

- *What was the demand for events within the City Centre? Had any requests for events been turned away? And had there been any work undertaken to indicate the economic benefits of events in the City Centre?*

Ms Culleton explained that she was not aware that anyone had been refused permission to hold an event although there was some management in respect of buskers and “chuggers”.

Car Parking – It was anticipated that there would be a shortfall in income from Contract Parking Fees and Car Parking Penalty Charge tickets. The sale of car park tickets was also expected to deliver a shortfall. There was concern about the continuing fall in usage levels of the City Council’s car parks measured both by tickets sold and length of stay. It was decided to commission consultants to examine how the Council’s objectives, in relation to the operation and charging policy in its car parks, could be operated as an alternative to annually increasing the price of car parking. The final report had been received and a proposed charging policy had been developed. The matter was discussed further following the presentation later on the agenda.

Parks and Green Spaces – It was proposed to increase allotments charges in line with the current Medium Term Financial Plan expectation. Discounts would continue to be available for individuals in receipt of a state pension and tenants’ associations that run 5 sites in the City.

Charges for the use of parks had been implemented and although there had to date been only one such chargeable event it was proposed that a standard charge be introduced. The Executive had been requested to issue the Assistant Director (Local Environment) (Ms Culleton) with delegated responsibility for making any changes to the charges set for the use of parks and green spaces and to have the scheme of delegation amended accordingly.

- *Would there be any issues around insurance?*

Ms Culleton explained that Officers would confirm that anyone applying for a licence had Public Liability Insurance.

- *An area of Bitts Park had been driven on and was very muddy.*

Ms Culleton confirmed that she would ask Officers to look into the matter and take enforcement action if necessary.

- *Would revenue from the charges be ring-fenced for work within Green Spaces?*

Ms Culleton confirmed that the funds would be used to reinstate the area.

- *Was it still possible to hire the sports fields?*

Ms Culleton confirmed that it was.

- *What was the cost to the Council to clean up after the annual fireworks event?*

Mr Crossley advised that those costs were taken into account when organising the event.

Ms Culleton explained that there would be new charges in relation to Bereavement Services with regard to the out of hours service.

Talkin Tarn – It was proposed that the current parking charges at Talkin Tarn be retained for 2012/2013. Other charges were currently prevalent at Talkin Tarn and it was proposed that the existing charge levels for 2011/2012 were maintained. However it was proposed to introduce a further income stream during 2012/2013 in respect of an annual registration fee for swimmers. Ms Culleton explained that legal advice had been taken in respect of those charges. The charges would enable the Council to manage the risks of people carrying out that activity. It was envisaged that the main activities would be triathlon events and would involve people from around the country.

Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act – It was proposed that the fixed penalty notice for offences under the Clean Neighbourhood and Environment Act were maintained but with a prompt payment reduction introduced in respect of dog fouling, dogs not on leads, fly posting and graffiti offences.

- *Was it possible to increase the fees?*

Ms Culleton advised that the fees were set nationally but it may be possible to lobby Government for the Council to set or increase the fees where necessary.

- *Would it be possible to publicise the number of fines that had been issued and paid?*

Ms Culleton explained that while it may be possible to publish those figures in the future it would not be possible to name the offenders. Ms Culleton added that work on a new database was underway from which that information could be extracted.

- *A Member had been advised that if he wished for a new litter bin to be provided within his Ward, it was possible that another would have to be removed.*

Ms Culleton explained the rationale behind that information and it was agreed that the matter of litter bins and dog fouling control would be an agenda item for a future meeting. Ms Culleton confirmed that it would be possible to extract that information on a Ward by Ward basis within the next 6 months and that a report would be submitted to the Panel on a 6-monthly basis.

Waste Services – Bulky Waste – It was proposed to increase the charge for special/bulky collections from £15 to £16 with effect from 1 April 2012.

- *Was the shortfall in income due to a reduction in the number of requests for the collection of bulky items? If so could that be due to the economic recession?*

Ms Culleton advised that there had been no significant rise in respect of fly-tipping and added that the increase in the charges was to reflect the inflation rate. She also believed that householders may be taking the items to the household waste refuse centre personally.

- *What was the cost to the City Council to administer the collection of bulky items?*

Ms Culleton confirmed that no invoices were issued and that the fee was taken at the point of booking the collection.

The Environment and Housing Portfolio Holder suggested that advice could be given with regard to organisations such as Centre 47 who collect certain items free of charge. It was also acknowledged that some companies removed old items when new replacement items were purchased.

Summary of Income Generated – with the exception of Talkin Tarn, the income of which was ring-fenced, and Car Parking income, which would be evaluated upon receipt of the consultant's report referred to earlier, acceptance of the charges highlighted within the report would result in an anticipated level of income of £1,287,200 against the Medium Term Financial Plan target of £1,299,100 in 2012/2013 which represented a shortfall of £11,900 against the Medium Term Financial Plan target.

RESOLVED: 1. That report LE.23/11 be noted.

2. That the panel supported the charges in respect of events and looked forward to the results of the review on events.

3. That the Panel supported the proposed charges but recommended that more discussion be held with Officers in Legal Services.

4. That litter and dog fouling control be considered at a future meeting of the Panel.

- **Economic Development – ED.39/11**

Mr Mason submitted report ED.39/11 that set out the proposed fees and charges for 2012/2013 relating to those services that fell within the responsibility of the Economic Development Directorate.

The Executive had, on 22 November 2011 (EX.143/11), received the report and decided:

“That the Executive agreed for consultation the proposed charges, as set out in the relevant Appendices to Report ED.39/11, with effect from 1 April 2012; noting the impact those would have on income generation as detailed within the report.”

Tourism and City Centre Management – it was considered that there was little scope for increasing charges from the sale of tickets for other organisations around the country. However a wider range of tickets such as fishing licences continued to be sold to try to maintain income. Other income streams such as accommodation booking and retail sales were under downward pressure due to reduced numbers passing through the Tourist Information Centre and the increased use of the internet.

- *How much publicity was there in respect of ticket sales for events outside Carlisle?*

The Economic Development Portfolio Holder advised that there was no publicity but that it could be included as part of the current review.

Assembly Room – The proposal to re-furbish and upgrade facilities in the Old Town Hall was subject to a current review. If the works proceeded it would curtail the use of the Assembly Room during that period. There was little scope to increase revenue in a substantial manner, especially if no refurbishment or improvements were made. It was considered that a small increase of around 3% and a budget figure of £2,100 for 2012/2013 was considered realistic in the circumstances.

- *Some Members believed that the Assembly Rooms should remain as a Civic amenity and not offered to a commercial organisation.*

The Economic Development Portfolio Holder advised that usage of the Assembly rooms was poor and reminded Members that the report that had been presented previously stated that any refurbishment would take place at a quieter period in the calendar. Members agreed that it was more practical to carry out any refurbishments prior to encouraging an increase in usage. The Assistant Director

(Local Environment) (Mrs Meek) recommended that a fundamental review could be carried out with regard to the services provided and the building itself.

Advertising – In previous years income had been generated by charging for advertising space with regard to tourist accommodation in publications produced by the City Council to promote Carlisle. The previous 2 years had broken even and that was expected to continue in 2012/2013. It was anticipated that income would be raised from advertising through the new Discover Carlisle website. However that had been minimal to date. The potential for developing that further would form part of the overall review of Tourism support that would occur by 1 April 2012.

Enterprise Centre – Market forces suggested that there was little scope for increasing rental values and income in the foreseeable future. It was proposed that service charges be raised 5% for 2012/2013 in line with inflation. It was anticipated that the Enterprise Centre would deliver a shortfall in 2012/2013. However a substantial review of the Enterprise Centre would be undertaken by 1 April 2012 including rental figures, service charges and miscellaneous income.

A report on the Enterprise Centre was an item to be considered later in the meeting.

Planning Services – It was anticipated that income from planning applications was likely to deliver a shortfall and it was unlikely that there would be any increase in planning fees which were set nationally. Many Planning Authorities charged for services other than planning fees and while those charges would not generate a large amount of income it was proposed that they should be introduced on 1 April 2012. It was also proposed to increase charges for technical reports and data. New regulations had allowed local discretion to set Building Control fees. In order to ensure that the service remained competitive a review of charges in January 2012 was proposed that would include a comparison with the Council's competitors.

Summary of Income Generated

The acceptance of the charges indicated within the report, with the exception of Building Control which was self financing, would result in an anticipated level of income of £560,900 against the Medium Term Financial Plan target of £696,400 making a shortfall of £135,500.

RESOLVED: That report ED.39/11 be noted.

Capital Budget Reports

(d) Revised Capital Programme 2012/2013 and Provisional Capital Programme

Mr Mason submitted report RD.66/11 that detailed the revised capital programme for 2011/2012 together with the proposed method of financing. The report also summarised the proposed programme for 2012/2013 to 2016/2017 in the light of new capital pressures identified, and summarised the estimated, and much reduced, capital resources available to fund the programme.

The Executive had, on 22 November 2011 (EX.148/11), received the report and decided that the Executive:

- “1. noted the revised capital programme and relevant financing for 2011/12 as set out in Appendices A and B of Report RD.66/11;
2. recommended that the City Council approve slippage of £4,257,000 from 2011/12 into 2012/13;
3. had given initial consideration to the capital spending requests for 2012/13 to 2016/17 contained in Report RD.66/11 in the light of the estimated available resources; and
4. noted that any capital scheme for which funding had been approved by the Council may only proceed after a full report, including business case and financial appraisal, had been approved.”

Mr Mason explained that vehicle and plant requirements would be considered over the next 5 years.

- **Town Hall** – the capital programme was included in the budget and a lot of work was required to ensure funding was available for the proposed works.
- *Would the refurbishment of the Town Hall be given a higher priority? Could funding set aside for projects that were not now going ahead be utilised for that work?*

Mrs Meek advised that it would be difficult to make any decision until completion of the review into the building and services provided.

- *What was the current situation in respect of the Asset Management Business Plan?*

Mr Mason explained that the Council would continue with the Asset Management Business Plan in accordance with the profile it contained.

RESOLVED: That report RD.66/11 be noted.

The Chairman announced that there would be a short adjournment of 10 minutes after which there would be the presentation on the Car Parking Study followed by agenda items A.5 and A.6.

EEOSP.76/11 PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED – That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the Public and Press were excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraph number (as

indicated in brackets against the minutes) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Local Government Act.

EEOSP.77/11 CAR PARKING STUDY

(Public and Press excluded by virtue of Paragraph 3)

The Assistant Director (Economic Development) (Ms Culleton) introduced Mr Trevor Clark from Buchanan Order Management who gave a presentation on the results of the Car Parking Study. Ms Culleton explained that Mr Clark had been invited to carry out the study as he had previous knowledge of the parking issues within Carlisle and would be able to give an independent view of the problems and suggest potential solutions. Ms Culleton advised that the report, with the exempt information removed, would be made public at a later date.

Mr Clark explained the study objectives and approach taken. Mr Clark had observed a number of car parks at various times of the day and had looked at the current charges in the car parks and the impact changes to those tariffs had had on usage. Mr Clark reminded Members of the current position and outlined the options that could be immediately available and also medium to longer term options. Mr Clark outlined a proposed new structure to the charging schedules in respect of both Pay and Display car parks and contract parking.

The Chairman thanked Mr Clark for the presentation and added that she was pleased that the study had linked the proposals to the economic vitality of the City as well as looking at the revenue benefits of the options.

- *Carlisle had unique geographical issues such as rural areas having no public transport and people living within the City who required a car to travel outside the City.*
- *A Member believed that some people were not prepared to walk long distances from car parks into the City Centre. There was the risk that they would use the facilities at Gretna Gateway or the Metro Centre which both had free parking.*

Mr Clark advised charges could be adjusted as a result of usage of the car parks.

The Environment and Housing Portfolio Holder advised that the Highways Joint Committee had responsibility for some of the parking issues raised in the report but there was not a single individual Officer that people could contact for information. It was suggested that Members of the Executive be empowered to work with the County Council's Highways and Transport Working Group to progress the necessary work.

- *Members suggested some alternatives to the recommendations within the report.*
- *When would the recommendations in the study be adopted and implemented? Why had enforcement declined? Had any thought been given to free parking days?*

The Environment and Housing Portfolio Holder explained that dialogue would be needed with the County Council before the recommendations could be implemented. However, Ms Culleton believed that the recommendations could be implemented in February following approval by Council.

With regard to enforcement, Ms Culleton explained that there had been a shortage of wardens but the Council now had the full complement of wardens to enforce that action.

There were a number of options suggested with regard to encouraging people to park in the City, one of which was a free parking day. Members agreed that there needed to be dialogue with businesses to determine what they required and how they could help.

- *Would it be easier to increase or decrease charges if machines with the latest technology were installed?*

Mr Clark confirmed that would be the case and the machines would also provide additional information regarding where people were parking and how long they were staying that would provide information to determine more appropriate charges.

RESOLVED: 1. That all recommendations in the Action Plan that were solely the responsibility of the City Council be approved with the exception imposing a charge for non-essential staff parking which would be reviewed.

2. That Members of the Executive be empowered to work with the County Council's Highways and Transport Working Group to progress the necessary work.

EEOSP.78/11 SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

During consideration of the above Item of Business, it was noted that the meeting had been in progress for 3 hours and it was moved, seconded and RESOLVED that Council Procedure Rule 9, in relation to the duration of meetings be suspended in order that the meeting could continue over the time limits of 3 hours.

EEOSP.79/11 ENTERPRISE CENTRE

(Public and Press excluded by virtue of Paragraph 3)

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer (Mrs Edwards) presented report OS.31/11 which included the final report of the Carlisle Enterprise Centre Task and Finish Group and made a number of recommendations for action for the Executive.

In considering the matter, Members raised the following comments and questions:

- *Members expressed concern that there did not appear to be a clear path of responsibility. It was agreed that a further recommendation be included in the report to ensure the clarification of roles and responsibilities.*
- *There should be regular reports on the Enterprise Centre submitted to the panel.*

The Economic Development Portfolio Holder advised that the issues were included within her regular report to Council.

The Assistant Director (Economic Development) (Mrs Meek) advised that a fundamental review was underway looking at the strategic issues and to ensure that the Centre was fit for purpose.

- *What was the timescale for the project review?*

Mrs Meek explained that the project group had been established and were currently collecting data. The group consisted of Officers from finance, HR, IT and property.

- *It was essential that the issue with United Utilities was addressed immediately.*

RESOLVED: 1. That the report of the Carlisle Enterprise Centre Task and Finish Group be agreed by the Panel and referred to the Executive for a response. .

EEOSP.80/11 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

Due to the hour the Chairman decided to defer the following items until the next meeting:

- A.4 – Overview Report incorporating the work programme and forward plan items
- A.5 – Corporate Plan: Mid year performance report
- A.6 – Environmental Performance of the Council.

(The meeting ended at 2:20pm)