

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 April 2016

PRESENT – Councillor Carson (in the Chair); Councillors MR Nicholson and Wright., (3)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Baldwin, Cossins, Lyonette and York. (4)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor H Scott.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Dave Winstanley, Assistant Director – Capital Projects, Transport and Highways Planning, Steve Petch, Place Strategy Manager and Lead Officer and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

P49. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interests reported at the meeting.

P50. MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2016/17 TO 2019/20 – The Scrutiny Committee met to discuss those proposals contained in phase 2 of the next round of spending reductions as contained within the Medium Term Financial Plan 2016/17 to 2019/20, which were specifically under its remit.

The Scrutiny Committee considered the following proposals in relation to the core Offer and the Impact Assessment Forms :-

LLE17 – Highway Authority Role – Detailed information on the role of the Council to manage and maintain the road network with the rules set by Government were contained in the core offer.

It was reported that this included maintaining all the part of the road network comprising, roads, footways, bridges and structures, Public Rights of Way, Vehicle Safety Barriers, Street Lights, traffic signals, signs and road markings; managing the road network to make the best use of the current road network , manage and co-ordinate all requests from utility companies to open the road and access their infrastructure; plan development of the future transport infrastructure requirements to support the town as it grows which involves securing funding from public and private sources to deliver investment and ensuring it is constructed to standards that the Council can accept; promotion of road safety, undertaking of collision/casualty data analysis, road user education, training and publicity that will improve road safety; and retention of a small sustainable transport function to provide public transport and sustainable transport statutory requirements which enables the Council to continue to look to develop business cases and funding bids for local motion type activity and travel behaviour work.

Members were informed that budgets were supplemented by Department for Transport (Local Transport Plan) Funding and resources prioritised in the order of maintenance, management and improvement.

Reference was made to income received from utilities for failures, inspection fees for new developments and funding from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund and Tees Valley Bus Net Work which helped to improve sustainability outcome.

Following a question Scrutiny was advised that general highway maintenance surfacing works goes out to tender although the Council was a lead authority with the majority of the north east using Darlington Borough Council's framework. The majority of works are done in-house although specialists are used to draw in resources.

It was also reported that the Council has recently received £92k for pot holes, circa £40k would be used for proactive treatments, circa £40k for deeper patching works and the money was ring-fenced.

Mc6 – Civil Enforcement Officers - Reference was made to the impact assessment in relation to the proposal to delete two Civil Enforcement Officer posts, one of which was currently vacant, which it was expected would see a net budget reduction of £44,329 by 2020/21.

Members were informed that the new multi-storey car park would reduce workload and the number of penalties issued.

LLE18 Concessionary Fares – Details were supplied of the core offer budget for the Concessionary Fares Scheme which the Council had to operate at significant cost. The scheme which allows eligible people to travel in the off peak period free of charge and must be administered and funded by the Council. Darlington's current scheme included a local discretionary companion pass enabling disabled passengers to have a travelling companion free of charge. There were a total of 20,000 active cards in the Borough at a cost of £3.6m to the Council.

Following a question Scrutiny was informed that local negotiation with bus operators was based on a national scheme and that Stockton Borough Council was the lead for Tees Valley Authority. This included fair use, prices, fuel costs and usage of the passes and it was stated that legislation required that Busses could not make a loss on the scheme and the cost of the use of the pass should be calculated from the journey start point.

LLE19 – Highways Design and Works, Building, Trading Services, Building Cleaning, School Meals, Nursery and Building – Details were supplied of the core offer budget for a number of services operated by the Council that traded with other public sector bodies and others of the Council, including works on capital projects.

Services included general highway maintenance services (fixing roads, pavements, signs and street lighting); delivery of large projects such as new schools, school extensions, housing projects, road improvements, bridge projects, car parks and refurbishment projects that are either funded by the Council or by money from other sources; building Services providing a building and maintenance service primarily to in-house services such as Council Housing, Schools and Corporate buildings and structures; provision of the School Meals service to junior schools across the Borough and catering services within sheltered housing accommodation; and provision of

Building Cleaning services to over 40 schools and Council offices as well as over 75 housing locations.

Following a question Scrutiny was advised that each service was reviewed annually; services are already bought by Durham County Council; and Hartlepool staff often undertake Darlington's peak workloads. There was also a joint service for traffic lights in the Tees Valley and Darlington was competing with Tees Valley Colleagues.

Scrutiny asked a question in relation to CA and Devo and was informed that if devolution were to happen there was an opportunity to bid into a fund of £15m. The Tees Valley sets priorities of economic growth and Darlington had been successful in securing a proportionate share of the money provided resources in Economic Growth were continued to develop options.

In relation to Bank Top, Scrutiny was advised that the Combined Authority had provided funding for the consultancy works and that Highways England had funded a study of the A66/A689.

LLE20 – Street Lighting – Details were supplied of the core offer budget for the Council's 12000 street lights which must be maintained by law.

It was stated that the Council had received £5.7m over a three year period from the Local Highway Maintenance Challenge Fund which would be used to convert all street lights to energy efficient LED lights and replace all street lighting columns over 40 years old. The replacement lighting would save circa £350k on the Council's electricity bill.

W14 – School Crossing Patrols – Reference was made to the impact assessment in relation to the proposal to ceasing the School Crossing Patrol Service, resulting in 33 posts being deleted and a net budget reduction of £126,000 by 2020/21.

Scrutiny was advised that although not a statutory duty this service linked to the Sustainable Community Strategy, there were 28 locations across the Borough which all met national criteria to provide a crossing service with circa 780,000 crossings per year being facilitated by patrollers.

Discussion ensued on the costs associated with removal of relevant street signage and the need for some patrollers to wait for more than one child before stopping traffic.

W15 – Concessionary Fares – Reference was made to the impact assessment in relation to the proposal to implement the Concessionary Fares Scheme at a statutory minimum level, introduction of ICT systems to reduce fraudulent use and reduced assumptions on inflation built in future years' budgets, resulting in a net budget reduction of £274,580 by 2020/21.

Scrutiny was advised that companion pass holders were being contacted to seek views of the impact of removal of the disabled person companion pass and the views of DAD and other groups were also being sought.

W16 – Cycle Training Level 3 – Reference was made to the impact assessment in relation to the proposal to cease Level 3 Cycle Training for 200 Year 7 children previously funded by Grant.

Scrutiny was advised that the Department for Transport was now willing to support an application for Level 3 training and it was hoped that there would be no impact on the service.

W17 – Child Pedestrian Training – Reference was made to the impact assessment in relation to the proposal to cease child pedestrian training which offered the development of life skills to 3,000 children at Yrs 1, 2 and 3 at a cost of £32,000 funded from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund Grant.

Scrutiny was advised that a bid had been successful to secure £32k from the National Driver Rehabilitation Scheme to continue the service in 16/17.

W18 – Local Motion Sustainable Transport Promotion – Reference was made to the impact assessment in relation to the proposal to cease Local Motion Marketing, Travel Behaviour and personalised Travel Planning as part of the programme to reduce the use of private cars and encourage the use of sustainable transport.

Scrutiny was advised that the future of the service was dependant on a decision of a funding application which would be received in May and the affected staff were aware of the current situation.

Discussion ensued on the availability of metrics determining the success of the Local Motion Scheme and the amount of redundancy costs involved.

W19 – Local Motion School Initiatives – Reference was made to the impact assessment in relation to the proposal to cease Local Motion Sustainable Transport School initiatives which had been delivered over the years through grant funding which was no longer available. Scrutiny was advised that it was hoped that individual schools would now undertake this initiative.

W20 – Blue Badge Parking – Reference was made to the impact assessment in relation to the proposal to introduce charging in off-street car parks for blue badge holders.

Scrutiny was advised that, by law, only free parking on street had to be provided, the Assistant Director – Regulatory Services was in the process of writing to a large sample of blue badge holders and organisations to determine their views and understand the impact of this proposal.

Discussion ensued on the provision of a transferrable ticket for car parks, although it was highlighted that the Council had both long and short stay car parks and the tickets could be mixed up, this could be considered. Such a scheme would possibly be inoperable on pay on exit car parks.

Futures Fund – School Crossing Patrols – Reference was made to the proposal to include, in the Futures Fund, a budget of £125,000 to ensure a safe environment for children walking to school.

RESOLVED – That the information provided at this stage be noted.
