

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Local Service Delivery Committee (Crewe)**
held on Monday, 31st October, 2011 at Lecture Theatre, Crewe Library,
Prince Albert Street, Crewe, Cheshire CW1 2DH

PRESENT

Councillor J Hammond, Chairman

Councillors D Bebbington, P Butterill, J Hammond, S Hogben, M Parsons,
B Silvester and M J Weatherill

WARD MEMBERS

Councillors I Faseyi, M Grant, P Nurse and M Sherratt

OFFICERS

C Allman	Corporate Projects and Programmes Manager
J Goodman	Economic Development Manager
P Goodwin	Finance Lead (Places)
G Kilminster	Head of Health and Wellbeing
J Leach	Market Manager
V Quayle	Head of Performance, Customer Services and Capacity
D Moulson	Democratic Services Officer

Apologies

None received.

8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made in the business of the meeting.

9 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee was invited to approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2011 which were tabled at the meeting and replaced the draft Minutes appended to the agenda.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2011 (as tabled at the meeting) be approved as a correct record.

10 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

In accordance with Procedure Rules Nos. 11 and 35, a total period of 10 minutes was allocated to members of the public to address the Committee on any matters relevant to its work.

No questions had been submitted or were forthcoming at the meeting and the Committee proceeded to its next item of business.

11 LOCAL SERVICE DELIVERY - TRANSFER AND DEVOLUTION

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Performance, Customer Services and Capacity and the Director of Finance and Business Services which, together with 8 appendices, provided detailed information in respect of the costs associated with the list of assets that could potentially form the calculation for a Special Expenses Levy (SEL) for 2012/2013.

Members of the Committee were invited by the Chairman to ask questions of the officers in respect of the information provided. To provide the context for the discussion, officers explained the difference between on-going annual costs and one-off expenditure and provided information on the breakdown of individual cost headings (including the budget set by the Crewe Charter Trustees).

A detailed debate then ensued regarding the data provided. In response to questions raised, it was confirmed that the estimates identified in the report for 2012-2013 would ensure that current service levels were maintained. Any enhancement to services which were proposed as part of the Committee's deliberations would require the introduction of a Special Expenses Levy to fund them.

Close examination of the figures by Members resulted in a number of comments being made as follows -

a) Ward Population Figures

Further clarification was sought as to whether the ward figures provided included the parished areas in Leighton and non-parished area of Crewe South.

b) Service Management and Support

A more detailed breakdown of the various overheads was requested to aid Members' understanding.

c) Allotments

i) Anecdotal evidence from Members suggested that there had been a significant rise in allotment rents which did not equate to the budgetary figures provided. The Head of Health and Wellbeing undertook to confirm the position and provide a written response to Members.

ii) Actual and estimated spend for 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 had been identified in the budget but no forecast had been recorded against a range of premises and supplies headings for 2011-2012. Officers undertook to provide an explanation of this variance.

(Note: At this point in the meeting, Councillor Hogben declared a personal interest as a Cheshire East Allotment Holder).

d) Markets

The cost to the Council of agency staff and the payment of overtime during 2010-2011 was of concern to Members. It was noted that this coincided with the temporary relocation of the outdoor market to Market Square during the redevelopment of Lyceum Square. However, given that estimates had been included in the 2012-13 budgets for continued funding in these areas, a more detailed explanation was requested for the next meeting.

The credibility of the figures relating to projected market rental income was questioned given that the number of stallholders was falling. This had been compounded by the fact that responsibility for the payment of business rates now fell directly to the traders although some were eligible for small business relief due to the size of their pitch/stall. Clarification was requested as to whether rents had been adjusted to reflect this change and whether this had been factored into calculations relating to projected income estimates. Members felt it would also be useful to ascertain how many stallholders were eligible for this relief.

Furthermore options for potentially assisting the markets operations in 2012-2013 were requested in order to assist the Committee in making recommendations to Cabinet about the use of any Special Expenses Levy.

The Chairman suggested that, if the Committee was minded to provide an enhancement of support for the markets service, a contingency fund could be created funded by the Special Expenses Levy, which could be used generally or to subsidise market stall rents. As a new policy, this proposal would require further consideration before it could be introduced and officers undertook to begin preliminary enquiries as to its feasibility, with a further discussion to be held at the next meeting of the Committee.

e) Town Centre Activities

i) The Committee was keen to avoid any perception of duplication of funding in respect of the Town's Christmas lights and it was suggested that responsibility for activities such as this should fall solely to Cheshire East as opposed to the Council and the Charter Trustees.

ii) Seasonal hanging baskets were provided in and around the Town Centre and, in response to a question raised, officers confirmed the current budget would allow for the same level of service to continue. Any further enhancement would need to be reflected in increased figures in the Special Expenses Levy.

f) Other Matters

i) A Member stated that it was difficult to judge from figures alone, the level of service currently provided and the standard of that service. He considered that performance information/statistics should be made available to Members which would enable the Committee to assess more easily where additional support may be required.

It was agreed that this was a role for the Committee in the future as information of this type was a developing picture; but it would be made available following agreement of the level of service to be provided and any Special Expenses Levy to be imposed.

ii) Harmonisation of officer's terms and conditions had not yet been fed into the budget but no significant variation was expected.

Having invited the Committee to speak, the Chairman then invited the Ward Members present to comment.

A Member who had not been present at the inaugural meeting in September, sought clarification as to the role of the Local Service Delivery Committee which was provided by officers. He also questioned whether the levying of a Special Expenses Levy would be subject to capping, as was the Council Tax.

Summary

During the debate, the Committee had requested further information on a number of issues, which officers were asked to provide. It was explained to Members that some of the data challenged at the meeting was still being developed as part of the budget process and it was anticipated that further updates would be provided as a matter of course. To assist Members and Officers, a summary of the data requested was provided as follows:

- a) Further clarification on ward population figures
- b) Detailed breakdown of overheads
- c) Written response outlining the position re. Allotment rents
- d) Identification of variance re. 2011-12 expenditure for premises and supplies (Allotments)
- e) Further clarification on agency staff, overtime and staff travel costs (Markets)
- f) Market rental incomes and number of stall holders entitled to Small Business Rate Relief
- g) Service Performance Information
- h) Potential options for additional support for the market service

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The recommendations of the Local Service Delivery Committee would be submitted to Cabinet in January for consideration. The Chairman suggested that it would be beneficial to agree a date for a provisional meeting of the Committee in December to enable the Committee to complete its work, should this be required.

RESOLVED: That -

a) The next meeting of the Committee be held at 1.30pm in the East Committee Room, Municipal Buildings, Crewe on Thursday, 24 November 2011; and

b) A provisional date of Monday 12 December 2011 be set aside for a further meeting of the Committee, if required.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 11.15 am

Councillor J Hammond