

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Local Service Delivery Committee (Crewe)**
held on Thursday, 24th November, 2011 at East Committee Room - Municipal
Buildings, Earle Street, Crewe, CW1 2BJ

PRESENT

Councillor J Hammond (Chairman)

Councillors D Bebbington (Vice-Chairman), S Hogben, B Silvester and
M J Weatherill

WARD MEMBERS

Councillors I Faseyi, M Grant, P Nurse, C G Thorley

OFFICERS

C Allman	Corporate Projects and Programmes Manager
G Edwards	Streetscape and Bereavement Service Manager
J Goodman	Economic Development Manager
P Goodwin	Finance Lead (Places)
R McGarry	Streetscape Technical Support Manager
V Quayle	Head of Performance, Customer Service and Capacity
P Sherratt	Head of Environmental Health
D Moulson	Democratic Services Officer

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S Hogben declared a personal interest in the business of the meeting by virtue of being a Cheshire East Allotment Holder.

No other declarations of interest were received.

14 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.

Honorary Alderman T Beard was in attendance at the meeting and, having given notice to speak, addressed the Committee on the subject of Crewe Market. His concerns centred on rental increases that had been imposed over recent years which, in his opinion, had contributed to the decline of the market. He also considered that Cheshire East Council should engage in regular dialogue with the stall holders to discuss their concerns and that consideration should be given to relocating the outdoor market to Market Square.

(Note: Councillor Faseyi joined the meeting at this point in the proceedings.)

15 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Additional information had been requested by the Committee at the October meeting, a summary of which was set out in the Minutes. Members commented that some of the data had not been made available for the meeting; the Head of Performance, Customer Services and Capacity thereby providing an explanation as to the present position in respect of performance statistics and employee numbers.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2011 be approved as a correct record.

16 UPDATE ON LOCAL SERVICE DELIVERY

On 3 October 2011, the Government announced that it had set aside £675 million to help local authorities in England freeze or reduce their Council Tax in 2012-13; Councils which did so receiving additional one-off funding equivalent to a 2.5 per cent rise in Council Tax.

In order to clarify the impact of this announcement on the work of the Committee, the Finance Lead (Places) explained that whilst the Council Tax regulations would not prevent the setting of a Special Expenses Levy (SEL), the amount raised in revenue across the borough could be no greater than that raised the previous year. Therefore, if a Special Expenses Levy was agreed, residents in other areas would subsequently pay less in order to balance the budget. If the Committee was minded to recommend this approach, Cabinet would need to consider the implications for the borough as a whole.

Having noted the position, the Committee moved on to consider its main item of business.

16.1 Allotments

Concerns had been raised at the previous meeting regarding the rising cost of allotment rents. The Streetscape and Bereavement Services Manager confirmed that an inflationary rise had been imposed in 2011/12; rents having remained static the previous year. Irrespective of the increase, the forecast for 2012/13 indicated a reduction in income and officers undertook to write to the Committee following the meeting to explain the variance.

Pages 13 and 15 of the agenda contained a list of allotment sites within Crewe and the surrounding areas, some of which would transfer to the control of the relevant Parish Council in 2012. Reassurances were given that any costs incurred from this process would not fall on the Special Expenses Levy.

16.2 Crewe Market

The Head of Environmental Services began by providing an explanation of the points raised by Members at the previous meeting which were outlined in paragraph 7 of the report. He acknowledged that each market was unique to its own Town and required a tailored management plan in order to address issues arising at that locality. To this end, the Council would continue to monitor occupancy levels at each site and would review neighbouring market rentals to ensure that the sites remained competitive.

A Member commented that the ratio of rental costs to available trading hours meant that it was sometimes in the best interests of Traders to take town centre premises, rather than retain their market stalls and he requested that this also be reviewed as part of the monitoring process.

To add value to the market, a number of initiatives had been proposed by the market traders, as listed in paragraph 7.1.5. of the report. The Head of Environmental Services stated that funding for these activities would need to be identified but that a levy (which the market traders themselves paid into) for promotional activities and existing Council budgets may yield the monies needed although further investigations would be required. Making the market visible was a key element to ensuring its viability and the Committee supported the proposals put forward.

A Notice of Motion was to go before Cabinet at the end of the month (November) seeking permission to hold a trial street market which would link the indoor hall with Market Square. A Member suggested that during the trial, the covered market adjacent to Lyceum Theatre could be given over to car parking, which would enable Lyceum Square to revert back to a cultural space, as intended following its re-development. A further suggestion was made regarding a temporary suspension of parking charges for two hours on Thomas Street Car Park to increase footfall passing the market.

Although the harmonisation of employees' terms and conditions was welcomed in respect of achieving savings; agency staffing costs remained of concern. The Head of Environmental Services stated that it was not cost effective for the Council to retain a pool of contracted staff to cover for last minutes absentees, rather agency staff would continue to be employed to ensure continuity of service as this was often at a lower cost. As the harmonisation of terms would not come into effect until 1 December 2011, its impact was not presently reflected in the figures.

16.3 Town Centre Management

As a result of the transfer of services to Parish Councils, the role of the Town Centre Manager was to change. Members explored whether there was scope for the post-holder to take on the management of Crewe Market in addition to their role but as the post's revised specification had not yet been agreed, it was unclear whether there would be the capacity for this. To aid Members' understanding of the role, it was agreed that a copy of the job description and draft lists of events overseen by the Town Centre Manager would be provided to the Committee in due course.

16.4 Christmas Lights

This matter had been discussed at the previous meeting but explanatory information regarding the breakdown of costs, repairs and purchases for 2011/2012 had not been made available. The Economic Development Manager undertook to provide such information to Members, as appropriate.

16.5 Service Management/Support Services

It was reported that the asset service charges set out in the appendix to the report, reflected management support to operational premises together with an apportionment of costs for the running/maintenance of corporate buildings. The Committee considered that the figure for Crewe seemed disproportionate and the Finance Lead (Places) agreed to re-examine the data.

17 **CONSIDERATION OF OTHER ENHANCEMENTS**

Net operating expenditure for 2012/2013 for the services (page 3) was estimated at £191,553. The Committee was invited to consider whether it wished to recommend any enhancements or additions to the services identified.

Members were reminded that the projected costs would ensure continuity of service and any additional costs would fall on the Council Tax payers of Crewe and would require a cut in funding in other areas. The Head of Performance, Customer Services and Capacity reassured Members that this was not a change of position, rather it was a question of timing and the issue would be considered afresh in the future.

The Committee therefore resolved to recommend to Cabinet that:

(1) A Special Expenses Levy be raised on each property in the un-parished area of Crewe to generate an amount not exceeding £191,553 as part of the Council Tax setting process to be approved by Council in February 2012 relating to 2012/13; and

(2) Cheshire East members and officers be urged to focus concerted effort, within existing resources, to enhance the visibility and vibrancy of Crewe market and implement a range of improvements as discussed at the meeting on 24th November, including possible car parking incentives. The Committee would like to make the Cabinet aware that the Committee fully discussed the possibility of generating extra resource to improve the market and would have been minded to recommend this had it not been for the guidance received about the council tax freeze grant conditions. The Committee is minded to take such a decision on enhancement in the future through the special expenses mechanism, should this prove to be necessary.

Note: Councillor Hogben voted against the motion which has been recorded in accordance with Committee Procedure Rule 31.4.

18 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

A provisional date of 12 December 2011 had been set aside for a further meeting of the Committee, if required. The Chairman confirmed that, as the Committee had concluded its business at today's meeting, the date was now surplus to requirements and would be cancelled.

The meeting commenced at 1.30 pm and concluded at 3.40 pm

Councillor J Hammond (Chairman)