

MINUTE of MEETING of the CULTURE AND LEISURE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL of WEST LoTHIAN COUNCIL held within COUNCIL CHAMBERS, WEST LoTHIAN CIVIC CENTRE, on 5 NOVEMBER 2015.

Present – Councillors Dave King (Chair), Jim Dixon, Carl John, Frank Toner, Jim Walker, John McGinty substituting for Cathy Muldoon

Apologies – Councillor Cathy Muldoon, Robin Strang, West Lothian Leisure

1. ORDER OF BUSINESS

The panel agreed to hear the deputation by Mr Mackay in relation to Modernising Customer Service Delivery.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

3. DEPUTATION

The panel heard Mr Mackay speak in relation to Modernising Customer Service Delivery. Mr Mackay explained that he represented combined Group of Management Committees within West Lothian. He explained that he appreciated that there were budget pressures and applauded the desire to keep facilities open. However he felt there was some confusion over the time period for commencement, and also felt that parts of the report were erroneous and ingenuous. In particular in relation to the part of the report where it refers to no one having raised issues around integration of the two services as he advised that he had raised issues.

He also had issues with the way the consultation was carried out as he was of the opinion the method was unsound and flawed and lacked imagination. He went on to explain that briefing meetings contained no information and at times were unintelligible, even to officers.

4. MODERNISING CUSTOMER SERVICE DELIVERY

The panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Area Services advising of plans being progressed through Delivering Better Outcomes “Modernising Frontline Services” project that would modernise the way frontline customer services would be delivered.

The report advised that in 2011, following the creation of Area Services, the council brought together a number of frontline facing services in the Customer Service Development unit. This included Library, Heritage, Customer Information Services (CIS) and Registration Services. The Community Facilities service was also managed as part of Area Services.

The service was currently structured around ten senior managers and a cluster arrangement based on geography. There were six integrated CIS/branch library clusters, two registration offices and two clusters of community centres. The services were delivered from 56 locations, including Bathgate, Fauldhouse and Strathbrock Partnership Centres.

Since 2011 the service structure was refined with the development of generic job roles which, in turn, streamlined front line services, making them more efficient and focused on the needs of the customer.

Scottish Government grant funding was not sufficient to meet the increasing costs and demands for council services and as a result, the council had to deliver £33.5 million of budget saving measures from 2015/16 to 2017/18 to ensure that the council could achieve a balanced revenue budget position.

At its meeting on 29 January 2015 the council agreed its budget for 2015/16 and a range of measures that would ensure the council balanced its budget over the coming three years.

The approved measures included the continued modernisation of front line services through the expansion of the proposed generic service delivery modes, with the objectives of:-

- Keeping libraries and community centres open
- Sustain the programmes that were currently delivered from community centres
- Work with management committees to support continuous development of community centre programmes
- Continue to recognise and support the significant volunteer contribution of community centre management committees.

There would be three tiers of service delivered across four neighbourhoods and were detailed within the report.

At its meeting on 26 May the Council Executive agreed:-

- That Area Services modernise its service delivery model based on the hierarchy described in the report in order to achieve the agreed savings; and
- Noted that an organisation change programme would be developed to deliver the agreed services subject to consultation with key stakeholder and an update report would be submitted to the Culture and Leisure PDSP prior to being submitted to the Council Executive for approval.

There then followed a consultation period with staff, unions and community centre management committees.

Management committees were invited to attend meetings to discuss the neighbourhood model and of the 37 management committees 24 committees were represented at the meetings. The first phase of meetings detailed the proposed service delivery model and the rationale behind it; the second phase detailed the proposed staffing arrangements in each centre. The feedback from these meetings was detailed in appendix 2.

During the second phase a number of management committees requested individual meetings to discuss and debate the detail of the proposals for their centres, and to help them understand the impact on service delivery. The summary of the proposed changes resulting from these discussions were detailed in appendix 3.

A dedicated email address was set up to allow comments and questions to be submitted. Twenty comments/questions were submitted by management committees. During the discussion management committees asked for an extension to the consultation period to allow them time to consider the proposals, and a one month extension was agreed.

There then followed a series of 23 meetings with individual management committees during which changes to their individual centres were discussed as well as ideas for alternative solutions. A summary of the alternatives and the officer's response was provided in appendix 5.

The Head of Area Services went on to explain that the council's relationship with management committees was governed by a number of documents including; lease agreements, trust deeds, and partnership agreements. Fifteen management committees have a partnership agreement with the council. Any proposed changes must be formally notified to the committee and a period of consultation undertaken before any change could be implemented. The council notified its intention to invoke a review of arrangements to the relevant management committees on 22 October 2015.

The report went on to advise that a number of measures agreed by the council in January 2015 were implemented and had resulted in a saving of £338,130 being achieved in 2015/16 and a further £148,621 for 2016/17. Savings scheduled for 2016/18 were identified through the application for voluntary severance of a further 17 staff. Not all these staff would be able to leave the service, and until there was an agreement about the shape of the service these applications could not be progressed.

In conclusion the report advised that the Council Executive agreed a new model of service delivery for frontline services based on a hierarchy within four neighbourhood clusters. The council engaged with staff, unions and management committees about the proposals and had undertaken significant consultation activity to ensure that staff, unions and management committees understood the proposals.

There were still some issues to be resolved with the management committees but these were not expected to have a significant impact on the overall direction of the project. By implementing the first phase of appointing the new management structure this would then allow further negotiation and agreement to be reached.

The council was embarking on a major service redesign in order to support delivery of a modernised frontline service to customers. This would be challenging but would offer staff and customers greater opportunities in the future. By taking these steps now the council was securing the longer term future of the service and its place in the community.

The report recommended that the Culture and Leisure PDSP:-

1. Note the consultation process and the feedback from management committees;
2. Recommend to Council Executive that Community Facilities and Customer Service Development be integrated and that a management structure created based on four neighbourhood clusters; and
3. Recommend to Council Executive that the implementation of frontline staffing arrangements be devolved to the new management team to implement.

There then followed discussions during which it was noted that Councillor Walker suggested that the process be put on hold until dialogue with the 15 management committees that have Partnership Agreements was concluded.

Councillor Dave King then suggested the following additional recommendation:-

That a report be brought to the Culture and Leisure PDSP 6 months after the implementation date of the revised Management Structure to review progress.

Decision

1. To note the terms of the report.
2. To agree an additional recommendation as follows:- that a report be brought back to the Culture and Leisure PDSP 6 months after the implementation date of the revised Management Structure to review progress.
3. To agree that the report be forwarded to the next meeting of the Council Executive with the recommendation that it be approved.