

Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee
Draft Minute Extract8 February 2008
5pm – 7.10pm**Present:** Councillors Taylor (Chair), Blackhurst, Boyce, Bradnack, Herbert, Ellis-Miller, Sadiq, Ward**Also Present:**Councillor Ian Nimmo-Smith, The Leader
Cllr Blair (for 08/SR/16)**For the Information of the Council****08/SR/12 Apologies for absence**

These were submitted by Ex Cllr for CS&R, Cllr Cantrill (in relation to 08/SR/17)

08/SR/13 Declarations of Interest

Cllrs Ward and Nimmo-Smith declared personal interests on 08/SR/14 as appointed Conservators of the River Cam.

08/SR/14 Public Questions

A member of the public asked questions relating to the agenda item on punting. He asked how many people had so far registered interest in the punt station at La Mimosa; had Scudamores Punting Company relinquished the lease; what was the Council's criteria to be for renting the pontoon and; what decisions had been taken to restrict the licence?

The Head of Property & Building Services commented that around 20 applications of interest had so far been received for using the pontoon and this was above the number that could be accommodated. The criteria for renting the pontoon was being drafted but would include financial checks, CRB check, how long an applicant had been working on the River, insurance, requirement for Conservators licence. Users would also be expected to sign up to a Code of Practice. Re. Scudamores, the Head of Legal Services stated that discussions were ongoing between the Council and the company and that was all that could be said at this time.

The questioner responded by asking how the Council would decide if all applicants fulfilled the criteria for renting the pontoon? The Head of Property & Building Services stated that it was expected to limit to 15 the number of operators from the punting station in year one and then review. The Safer Communities Manager stated that the Council was conscious that people's

livelehoods were dependent on the outcome and would work on a process which was fair and transparent. The questioner stated that there was concern among the independent operators that the pontoon would not be returned to the Council.

08/SR/15 Punt Operation in the City of Cambridge

The Chair drew the Committee's attention to an additional three letters which had been circulated by email prior to the meeting (and tabled) from Pinsent Masons Solicitors (6/2/08), Taylor Vinters Solicitors (6/2/08) and Ms Wynne (6/2/08).

The Safer Communities Manager introduced the report. Cll Ward highlighted that the Cam Conservators had taken the view that they could not limit the number of punts on the River (see 4.4. and Appendix 10). Cllr Herbert questioned when the Council would be looking at the Quayside area as that had been the basis of the Labour Notice of Motion to Council in May 07. He acknowledged the work the officers had undertaken, and would encourage further consideration by the Council and Conservators of the use of double punts and to limit numbers of all punts. The Head of Legal Services stated that it would be premature to comment on the issues to do with the use of Quayside. If the Council began to enforce against the use of Jesus Green by commercial punt operators, the likelihood of touting further in the city centre would be reduced. The Committee noted that Reading and Canterbury Councils were pursuing action on touting through legislation and the Council would be monitoring this approach closely. The Chair welcomed the proposal to support the punting industry through better information at the Visitor Information Centre and the Head of Tourism & City Centre confirmed that this was in the early stage of planning.

The Leader commented that the package of measures being proposed were welcomed and thanked the officers for their work in this area. He envisaged that the Conditions of the Licence to be issued to those using La Mimosa should in time be applied to all operators using Council owned property, so reducing reliance on a voluntary code and ensuring a level playing field.

The Scrutiny Committee approved the recommendations by 5 votes to 0.

The Leader agreed the recommendations.

08/SR/16 Draft Revenue and Capital Budgets revised 2007/08, proposed 2008/09 and forecast 2009/10

The Chair ruled that under 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 the late items from the Director of Finance (Labour Group Amendment, Chesterton Road Toilets and LDV funding) should be considered despite not being available five clear days prior to the meeting.

The Scrutiny Committee had the following papers:

(i) Labour amendment; (ii) Executive budget update: Chesterton Road Public Toilets Modernisation Project; (iii) Executive budget update: Growth projects - LDV funding.

Before debating the amendments, Councillor Herbert stated that there had been no scrutiny of the Executive's budget agreed on 24 January. In particular, the creation of a 'Climate Change Fund' and how that Fund would be allocated. He also commented on the (late) tabled items to do with Chesterton Road Toilets and LDV funding and asked that Members should look at revising the budget process for next year. The Leader replied by offering to answer any questions that Cllr Herbert had in relation to the Executive's budget if he put them in writing prior to Council. With regard to the Climate Change Fund, the criteria to measure bids against and other detail would be subject to further decisions. Councillor Herbert said that scrutiny of the management of the new Fund had not been part of the budget process and should have been.

(i) Labour Group Budget Amendment

The following questions were put by the Liberal Democrat members on the items in the Labour amendment and answered (A) as listed:

Appendix I – (CS&R portfolio S2) Reduce scrutiny committees and quantity of work on detailed reports

A – Don't agree with current approach to pre decision scrutiny, which had been debated on many occasions and is currently subject to the work of a Member Working Group. Scrutiny would pay for itself (e.g financial scrutiny of central overheads, base budgeting). Scrutiny of external partnerships is needed.

Appendix T (CD&H portfolio) C2 – Funding to create park at Howard Mallett. Not clear what the figure of £700k was based on?

A – Based on discussions with current occupier. It doesn't mean that there wouldn't be other costs in due course. That would be for the Council to take decisions on at the relevant time.

Appendix Z (CC&G portfolio) CCF2 – Weekend bus ticket discount for teenagers. How do you get the £30k figure?

A – Based on discussions with officers and from other local authorities

Cllr Boyce said that there it was unfortunate that Labour Councillors didn't raise these proposals during the Scrutiny Committees as the Executive could then have considered them for inclusion in its draft Budget. He also said that concerning scrutiny, the debate at the Member Working Group was about the way councillors scrutinized finance (which might be bettered) rather than the Council's financial management (which was very good).

Cllr Herbert stated that it was difficult to scrutinize the Executive's budget as the list of PPFs that are submitted to Scrutiny Committees doesn't correlate to a revised list then submitted to the Executive. He asked whether there should be future scrutiny of the Executive's decision to drop some PPF bids over others.

(ii) Chesterton Road Public Toilets Modernisation Project

The Director of Finance introduced the item and explained that it had been judged better to seek the Leader's approval to include this late item into the Executive's budget package rather than seek an urgent decision to agree additional funding sometime after the budget had been set. Cllr Herbert was concerned about the increased costs and whether the priority of this toilet ahead of Drummer Street was right. Cllr Bradnack asked if this were to go ahead, would improved signage to the new facility and Park Street toilets negate the need for a public toilet on Jesus Green. He asked for details of usage of these toilets (the Director of Environment & Planning would provide this).

(iii) Growth Projects – Local Delivery Vehicle (LDV) Funding

The Director of Environment & Planning advised that the amendment was procedural in that the funding was allocated from Cambridgeshire Horizons. There were other projects delivering growth, but those listed in the Executive budget amendment were being led by the City Council.

08/SR/17 Local Trade Union Facility Agreement

The decision was deferred to the next meeting as the Ex Cllr for CS&R was unavoidably absent.

Chair