LOCAL COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND LEADERSHIP

Minutes of a Meeting of the Local Committee Chairs and Leadership held on Wednesday, 23 January 2013 at 10.00 am at The Courts, Carlisle

PRESENT:

Mr E Martin (Chair)

Mr GD Cook       Mr EW Nicholson
Miss HJ Fearon    Mrs W Skillicorn
Mr R Guselli     Mr M Stephenson
Mr G Humes       Mr C Weber
Mr J Mallinson   Mrs J Willis
Mr FI Morgan     Mr SF Young (Vice-Chair)

Also in Attendance:-

Mrs J Crellin - Assistant Director - Finance
Mrs J Currie - Senior Democratic Services Officer
Mrs K Johnson - Area Support Manager - Barrow & South Lakeland
Mr A Moss - Assistant Director - Highways and Transportation
Dr D Roberts - Assistant Director Policy and Performance
Mr D Sheard - Area Support Manager North
Ms J Stannard - Chief Executive
Mr T Thwaites - Area Support Manager

PART 1 – ITEMS CONSIDERED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

57 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Mr D Marcus.

58 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that, the minutes of the last meeting held on Wednesday 28 November 2012 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

59 LOCAL COMMITTEE BUDGET ALLOCATIONS 2013/14

Members considered a report from the Corporate Director – Resources and presented by the Assistant Director – Finance, which sought to advise members of the proposed revenue and capital allocation for Local Committees in 2013/14.

She explained that total local committee allocations were considered by County Council as part of the overall budget setting process. Allocations to individual Committees were calculated based on the formula agreed by Cabinet on 3 March 2011.
At the time of presenting the report details were still being finalised of the revenue settlement for individual authorities for 2013/14 although a draft budget was approved by Cabinet in December 2012 and a final budget would be proposed to Cabinet to recommend to County Council in February 2013.

Cabinet had received reports at its meetings in November and December which set out the Minimum Revenue Planning Gap for 2013-14 of £18m and this was the basis of the options for budget consultation issued. The Probable Planning Gap, however was not £21.6m, given the uncertainties arising from the significant changes in methodology and approach to the funding of local government by central government from 1 April 2013.

The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement was issued later than in previous years in December and the impact is an increase in the Probable Budget Planning Gap of £0.9m to £22.5m. If the Council were to accept the Council Tax Freeze Grant, however, this gap would increase by a further £2m to £24.5m.

In relation to local committees the Assistant Director said Members would remember a number of changes were made to Local Committee budgets in 2011/12. Local Committees were given greater flexibility on the use of their budgets, and restrictions or the ring fencing associated with specific budget lines was removed to a certain degree. Council agreed on 16th February 2011 that Local Committee revenue budgets should include specific budgets for the following areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>USE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highways Revenue</td>
<td>To be used on highways activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood Teams</td>
<td>Budget for staffing, managed by the Assistant Director – Policy and Performance. Cannot be vired, but can be supplemented by other budgets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Member Schemes</td>
<td>Fully flexible. Local members to bring proposals for spending to Local Committee for decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Provision</td>
<td>Fully flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-19 Services</td>
<td>To be used in 0-19 projects and services Supporting guidance was issued.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools crossing patrols</td>
<td>To be used on crossing patrols or road safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandgate Hydrotherapy Pool</td>
<td>To be used to support the pool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money Advice</td>
<td>To be used on this area / contracts only.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To enable each Local Committee to manage its allocation to meets its priorities, it was proposed to increase the flexibility further and remove the ring fencing of 0-19 Services.

The Highways Revenue budget areas were merged from the 2011/12 budget exercise, giving Local Committees discretion as to local priorities for spending revenue resources in line with Better Highways principles. The overriding priority
was maintaining a safe and reliable highway network. This budget may only be spent on highways and street lighting. The methodology to allocate the highways budget between the Local Committees for 2013/14 was the same as that used in 2012/13.

The consultation document for the draft revenue budget 2013/14 contained a proposal that all six of the Council’s Local Committees would see a cash reduction of 20% in relation to specific areas (0-19, general provision and school crossing patrol budget allocations). This cash reduction totalled £0.324m over the six Local Committees. However, Local Committees would have the discretion to manage their budget within the new cash limit and so it is for each Local Committee to decide exactly how to support the local priorities within available budgets.

The consultation document also contained a proposal in respect of Highways capital and revenue budgets where it was proposed to devolve a further £0.8m of capital funding to Local Committees from the Priority Transport Improvement Schemes (PTIS) capital highways budget, whilst at the same time the highways revenue budget for Local Committees would be reduced by £0.8m.

This meant that the Local Committees would change the nature of some of the highways works they funded from maintenance, for example repair of potholes, to larger scale improvements such as resurfacing. Making use of capital funding in this way should allow available resources to be most effectively targeted to meet local highways priorities.

The Neighbourhood Teams budget reflected the staffing at current levels for the teams. Overall, the teams were subject to a restructure to deliver part year savings in 2011/12, and full year savings in 2012/13. These budgets may not be vired by the Local Committees, but could be supplemented by other budgets.

The General Provision could be used for any budget area including Neighbourhood Forum grants, and subsidising rents to Voluntary Organisations. This budget may be vired to support other areas. Whilst the 0-19 budget could be used to support 0-19 activities, including grants to youth organisations, but it was proposed that it may be used to support other areas.

Local Committees could reduce the amount or increase the amount they spend on School Crossing Patrols, as determined by the School Crossing Patrols operational in their area and therefore any expenditure from the School Crossing Patrols allocation (once it is locally determined) must be spent either on crossing patrols or road safety.

The Money Advice budget reflected the recent Cabinet decision to procure for future services at the current budget level and the emphasis on the key Council priority of ensuring that the most vulnerable people in our communities received the support they needed.

The 2011-12 and 2012-13 budgets included a Local Member Schemes budget. These budgets were for one year only, but it had been agreed that the resources could be spent over a period of two years and balances were carried forward. The 2012-13 allocation was funded from underspends across Council budgets in 2011-12 and was the decision of Council in February 2012. Any underspending on the 2012/13 Member schemes budget would be carried forward to 2013/14.
The changes to both the revenue and capital allocations were equivalent, therefore for each Local Committee area the level of reduction in highways revenue funding was equally matched with the increase in highways capital funding. There was a £ for £ replacement, but the nature of the works to be undertaken would be capital.

The Deputy Leader reminded everyone that it was crucial for local committees to agree their budget allocations in relation to highways as soon as practicable to allow works to be programmed. Members agreed that this should not wait until after the elections but should be agreed as soon as possible to prevent any delays in grant processes following the election.

Members asked if any of the proposals would have an effect on the Better Highways Teams, and officers confirmed there should be no adverse impact on the work of the Better Highways Teams.

The Chair of Barrow Local Committee felt that the formula was unfair, especially when Barrow was receiving budget reductions but had the most deprived areas of the county. He thought that budgets should be allocated on a needs basis and not on a population basis. This was debated by members, with some who felt this would be advantageous, whilst others felt the current formula used was adequate. The Deputy Leader said that this debate could only be reconsidered with the agreement of all the Chairs and Vice Chairs, and at this stage agreement could not be reached. It was suggested that this be looked at again in the near future, and that Scrutiny be invited to consider this, after the elections had taken place.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

60 UNAUTHORISED SIGNS AND OTHER OBSTRUCTIONS SERVICE PROCEDURE

The Assistant Director – Highways and Transportation presented a report which briefed members on proposed changes to an existing highway service procedure; “Unauthorised Signs and Other Obstructions in the Highway”, and highlighted the political sensitivities of making any changes. The service procedure specifically deals with A boards placed on pedestrian areas which had been a contentious issue with some disability groups.

The changes followed an Ombudsman complaint about obstructions from A boards. The Ombudsman had recommended an increase in the absolute minimum width from 1.0m to 1.2m. The stated absolute minimum width of 1.2m would only be used in exceptional circumstances where an A board could be accommodated without impacting on pedestrians, and not in areas of high footfall.

The proposed service procedure stated that a 2m width should be provided under normal circumstances to allow two wheelchairs to pass, and that as a minimum requirement 1.5m would be considered to allow a wheelchair and walkers to pass. The 1.2m width would only be used in exceptional circumstances in areas of low footfall and isolated locations and not considered suitable for town centres.
The allowance of A boards had been a contentious issue with both traders (who wished to freely advertise in pedestrian areas) and disability groups (who had concerns about obstructing their passage). The issue had also raised vocal comment in the local press.

The proposed service procedure ensured compliance with highway law and equality standards, helped control and regulate street scene “sign clutter” and provided a framework which was fair and reasonable to businesses and traders. The proposal was that only one ‘A’ board would be allowed per property regardless of how many businesses were situated within it.

Members asked if the County Council licensed the A Boards, and the Assistant Director explained that the council give permission for the boards but they did not require a license.

One of the members felt that in circumstances where there was a narrow lane with many premises, the shops should be able to use one board for a number of premises rather than one board each. The Assistant Director confirmed this would be possible.

The Chair of South Lakeland Local Committee welcomed the policy but felt that the issue of enforcement might be challenging. With the South Lakeland area the Chamber of Trade was undertaking enforcement, but this had not been tested as there had not been any breaches of the policy yet.

The Vice Chair of Allerdale Local Committee said a pilot had been carried out in Keswick and Cockermouth in relation to A Boards, which had been very successful. He suggested that the lessons learned during this pilot should be incorporated into the policy.

Members felt that the policy was too detailed and a plain English version should be produced which could then be distributed to all retailers. They also suggested it would be advantageous to produce a media strategy for selling this to the media and the public.

The Chair suggested that members support the recommendation that the policy be adopted, but that it would be reviewed in 12 months time to assess how successful it had been. This was AGREED.

61 HIGHWAYS RESTRUCTURE

The Leader of the Council was aware that many of the Chair and Vice Chairs were concerned about the current proposals for the restructure of the Highways Service. He felt that member involvement was crucial for service delivery but the structures within the Highways Department were for the officers to decide.

It was AGREED that the Chief Executive would organise a meeting for the Leader, Deputy Leader, Chairs and Vice Chairs of the local committees and the Cabinet Member for Economy and Highways to meet with relevant officers as soon as possible (Action: JS)
62 DATE & TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place on Monday 29 July 2013 at 10am in County Offices Kendal.

The meeting ended at 12.35 pm