

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY PANEL ON THE SOCIETAL IMPACT OF THE IN-YEAR GRANT REDUCTIONS

2.30pm 23 NOVEMBER 2010

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

DRAFT MINUTES

Present: Councillor Watkins (Chairman)

Also in attendance: Councillors Mitchell and Wakefield-Jarrett

PART ONE

12. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

12a Declarations of Substitutes

Substitutes are not allowed on scrutiny panels

12b Declarations of Interests

There were none.

12c Declaration of Party Whip

There were none.

12d Exclusion of Press and Public

12.1 Councillor David Watkins the Panel Chairman reminded the meeting that anyone could ask to speak to panel in private session or to an individual member of the panel in the presence of a scrutiny officer.

12.2 In accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in section 100I (1) of the said Act.

12.3 RESOLVED: That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

13. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 OCTOBER 2010

13.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

14. CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

14.1 There was none.

15. TO NOTE EXTRACT FROM 22 JULY CABINET REPORT AND MAIN AREA OF PANEL QUESTIONS

15.1 The information was noted.

16. TO RECEIVE INFORMATION FROM THE COMMISSIONER, COMMUNITY SAFETY

16.1 The Commissioner, Community Safety managed the budget on behalf of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP). She told the Panel that the CDRP in-year budget reductions and their effects were uncomplicated. This was for two main reasons. Firstly, because the budget was pooled from a dozen or so sources. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 had created Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRP) and agreed activities and posts were funded across different sections of funding streams.

16.2 Therefore, when unexpected changes were made to budgets in the middle of the financial year (this was the for the first time ever), this 'cross-patch' pooled funding arrangements that had been in place for many years, made the changes slightly easier to manage than other services as there was some flexibility to 'juggle' funding streams and retain key activities and posts.

16.3 Secondly the main CDRP grant reduction had been from Prevent (violent extremism.) For 2009-2010 the Brighton and Hove CDRP had only just qualified to receive the budget and for the year 2008-2009 had received only part-year funding. This was very new work that had not been undertaken before and would take some time to become established. It involved a Community Engagement post and managerial post with responsibility for leading the hate crime team. Funds had already been set aside for new community initiatives targeted at groups that could be at higher risk of being drawn into terrorist activities.

16.4 The CDRP was open and transparent with community representatives about the sources and purposes of the funding, and how the money was being spent. A Project Board including faith-based groups was established and some work had started to deliver results. Therefore at the time of the cuts announcements in July, community leaders were well prepared and there was agreement on a small reduction in some specific projects (not staff) but enthusiasm to continue joint working.

16.5 Much development time was needed to deliver on new objectives. Some excellent projects were just now at the stage of 'bedding down.' So there was a less dramatic change caused by the funding reduction in this relatively new area of work compared with a reduction to a long established service.

16.6 The other Home Office reduction of £30,000 had not caused negative impact. There was a small contingency fund as a result of bids that were made regularly to the Home Office and the shortfall had been covered by this and by funds allocated to a project to expand Community Safety Services that did not go ahead for practical, not financial, reasons.

16.7 Asked how funding decisions were made, the Commissioner, Community Safety referred to CDRP joint decision-making on priorities, based on year-round strategic assessments on crime and disorder. Budget meetings were held throughout the year and officer recommendations were taken to the Safe in the City Partnership. This was led by the Council's Chief Executive and Divisional Police Commander and comprised senior representation from key partners including the Cabinet Member for Community Safety and the Community and Voluntary Sector Forum.

16.8 The process was linked to financial services and decision-making of the local authority. The Commissioner of Community Safety stressed the importance of ensuring constant feedback on joint decision-making to tie in with local authority corporate decision-making and said that the CDRP do this successfully.

16.9 The Panel was pleased that posts had been saved and that prioritisation was based on needs. Members remarked that there would be no room for slippage in the current financial climate; early prioritisation for newly-funded projects was key.

16.10 There were questions: whether it could be seen as a weakness for a budget to be made up of a large number of different grants, starting and ending at different times; how the anticipated removal of ring-fencing, might impact on services; how to ensure that a particular community was not disproportionately affected by budget cuts in more than one service area.

16.11 The Commissioner, Community Safety said that the well-prepared strategic needs assessment was the 'bedrock' for making decisions on where to invest to reduce crime and increase safety. This was a legal requirement.

In her experience transparency about funding and joint working to build up trust with communities was very important; as evidenced by the management of the 'Prevent' grant reduction.

16.12 The possible implications of less ring-fencing were unknown; there being advantages and disadvantages. Ring-fenced grants can protect and secure activities or projects; non-ring-fencing gives additional flexibility and pooled budgets are appropriate for partnership working.

16.13 The in-year cuts of the CDRP budget had not had an effect on service users. For future budgets including reductions, officers can assess potential impact by applying Equalities Impact Assessments. Officers would always look to achieve the same or better level of service in the face of reduced income. Creative ways of working differently were being developed to achieve joint delivery of shared objectives.

16.14 Replying to questions the Commissioner, Community Safety said that 26% of the CDRP budget comprised pooled funds which included police posts. Partner organisations also faced financial pressures, and joint decisions were made on adjusting spending plans in tandem with the local authority. The 13 clear agreed and ranked joint priorities as set out in the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy were subject to annual review.

16.15 The Commissioner, Community Safety was confident that the system and structure for making joint decisions was very robust. Depending on the level of possible future cuts prioritisation could become more challenging. It is helpful to work as a real partnership.

17. TO RECEIVE FURTHER INFORMATION ON SUSSEX SAFER ROADS PARTNERSHIP

17.1 The Road Safety Manager gave information and answered questions under the following item.

18. TO RECEIVE INFORMATION ON LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN

18.1 The Lead Commissioner for City Regulation and Infrastructure said the reduction in the LTP capital programme, announced part-way through the financial year, was difficult to manage. Each budget allocation was built up through a prioritisation process.

18.2 Asked how the Sussex Safer Roads Partnership (SSRP) had dealt with the budget reductions, the Road Safety Manager outlined the approach.

18.3 The SSRP was funded by Government grant through the three local highway authorities, East and West Sussex County Councils and Brighton and Hove City Council and led by Cabinet members from the three authorities. Other partners are Sussex Police, the Fire and Rescue Services from West and East Sussex, the Highways Agency and HM Courts' Service.

18.4 Most of the funding is from the Area Based Grant paid to local authorities who transfer funds into a pooled budget. This has a 'smoothing' effect and allows for more flexibility. Some voluntary contributions are also received for example from the Highways Agency and the Football Association.

18.5 At the start of the financial year each of the eight partners submitted bids relating to road safety; and priorities for road safety measures, were agreed with a level of flexibility, by the Partnership. Key issues typically differ between towns/cities where pedestrian and bus incidents can predominate compared with rural areas where speeding on country roads is a major concern.

18.6 The average reduction of around 40% in the SSRP capital budget was part of the national aim to reduce the number of speed cameras. The SSRP strategy sub-group met on 16 June, agreeing to act fast to review this year's road safety projects. The impact on groups was taken into account. Contractual and financial criteria were already in place.

18.7 At a further meeting in July, the 'core business' for the SSRP was re-visited; some areas such as certain post-collision remedial engineering could arguably fall outside a road safety partnership remit and was more a core responsibility of the local authority. Means of funding other areas including education training and publicity were also carefully considered.

18.8 The Partnership looked to find areas where funding could be reduced but the service still be delivered, or where a cut in service could be found. Evidence was collected and the process was refined over a series of 4-5 meetings, until the Partnership ratified the plan on 24 August.

18.9 The value of pooling budgets in this way, was highlighted by members of the Panel

18.10 The Road Safety Manager answered questions. Widening the scope of the speed awareness courses, linked to a reduction in the speed threshold, would raise the number of potential clients and help fill the funding gap. He said speed cameras were unpopular and where there was a link with education, enforcement measures were more widely acceptable. The courses were a potential source of income to reinvest in road safety.

18.11 The Central Ticket Office which handles summonses and offers speed awareness courses, was based at Shoreham Police Station.

18.12 Unlike some other partnerships in the UK, the SSRP did not just deal with speed cameras. It has funded relatively small-scale engineering projects including a contribution to a pedestrian crossing within a Safer Routes to School Scheme, and promotes road safety. A good communications team covers campaigns and publicity including press, media and projects in schools. Income cuts for this area could mean a reduction in some types of preventative work.

18.13 Other budget lines had been rationalised to cover the Bikeability training as it is a requirement that Trainers had to be assessed.

18.14 Speed indicator devices (SIDs) that measure the speed of approaching vehicles are now on loan to Sussex Police for use by PCSOs to gather data on vehicle speed, help influence motorist behaviour and give public reassurance. Other organisations such as ESFRS may also wish to use these and a strategy for using SID is being developed.

18.15 The Panel asked about the overall combined impact on children of measures, such as a reduction on warning lights at schools and child pedestrian training. Members heard that there was a programme of warning light replacement; some lights were old and unreliable and others were not needed where pedestrian crossings had since been introduced. Budget lines had been moved to pay for trainers for this financial year but vacancies were being held. Safer Routes to School would be prioritised for next year's proposals.

18.16 Councillor Watkins the Panel Chairman noted that it had taken 3 months – a relatively short time - for mutual agreement by the 8 partners, to retain as much of the services as possible within the new budgetary constraints. He suggested that the agreed initial criteria, pre-planning and successful joint working with and some flexibility, had allowed the Partnership to cope reasonably well with the mid-year cuts. Road Safety Manager Clarke agreed.

18.17 Members asked about the implications of the in-year reductions for the LTP for programme delivery and staff. The Lead Commissioner for City Regulation and Infrastructure said it was difficult to find the level of cuts within a short time. The key required outcomes were looked at; contractual commitments; Road Safety and maintenance; decisions were needed on what to protect and where resources could be found; for example in some of the 'softer' areas such as marketing, car-free-day and updating websites. The matched funding requirements for projects under the Cycling Towns and Civitas were also a main consideration.

18.18 Two full-time posts had been affected this year. Vacancies had been held to soften the impact and proposals were being developed for 2011-2012.

18.19 Asked about the dropped kerb programme, within which a relatively small budget could make a big difference to certain groups, Lead Commissioner for City Regulation and Infrastructure said there is a commitment to this; it would have been part of LTP3 and would now be prioritised in the next financial year. Other funding sources including via developer contributions and Community Infrastructure Funds (CIF) for Shoreham Harbour regeneration, were used to introduce dropped kerbs as a part of other schemes when the opportunity arose. Similarly work on the Walking Network had been deferred rather than cut.

18.20 Work with partners was in progress on additional real-time bus information signs.

18.21 Panel Members were concerned to ensure that Equalities Impact Assessments were carried out to help identify groups that may be affected by budget decisions including in more than one service area.

**19. TO RECEIVE FURTHER INFORMATION ON GRANT REDUCTIONS FROM
DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION**

19.1 The Lead Commissioner for Schools Skills and Learning gave information to the scrutiny panel on reductions in the school improvement grant. The Equality Impact Assessment had appeared as part of the agenda of the previous meeting.

19.2 Changes in national policy on local authority school improvement function had been anticipated for some years and different ways to continue had been considered for some time. (The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is ring-fenced and based on pupil numbers; it cannot be used by the local authority for school improvement, though local authority work elsewhere does meet the DSG criteria.)

19.3 To deliver this, local authorities have teams of consultants providing curriculum teaching and learning support, linked with National Strategy priorities. This work of this team was due to finish in April 2011 and the decision has been taken to look to bring this forward to December.

19.4 Now schools are to take over school improvement work, with schools supporting each other. There are already examples of this: lead teachers in Maths and English for example are leading in their own schools and in other schools. There are now 25 lead teachers that are deployed to other schools for 15 days per year and this development work could continue.

19.5 Consultations with Human Resources and Unions are in progress. A positive outcome is that expertise in school improvement is being maintained. Redeployment, also involving schools, has meant that staff have gone back into schools and have stayed within school improvement work.

19.6 Asked about the stress on schools and freeing teachers' time to teach children and young people, and impact on society, Lead Commissioner for Schools Skills and Learning agreed that there is a lot of responsibility in schools. But she said that this is an area which is part of all schools' role and where the expertise is, and where, with good management, schools do very well. This was why there had been a 'journey' towards this type of arrangement for some while.

19.7 Answering a query about the reasoning behind the decision and risk assessment of the outcome of the change, the Lead Commissioner for Schools Skills and Learning said the national literacy and maths strategies had been a 'top-down' approach. The Equality Impact assessment that had been provided to the previous Panel meeting (Item 7) indicated that vulnerable children would not be affected. Two consultants were being retained to roll out 'Every Child and Reader' and 'Every Child Counts' in years 1 and 2. Services with East Sussex for travellers and the Children in Care team remained in place.

19.8 The Head of Service, Children and Families told the Panel that changes to Connexions services had also been anticipated. Prior to the announcement of budget reductions, the benefit of the services to groups of children and young people had been looked at; where was the best impact being delivered, especially in relation to employability.

19.9 There were high expectations of the service – Connexions was intended to cover a wide range of services and over time had become ‘all things to all people’. It was found that there was a clear need for general advice services but it was unclear whether Connexions was best placed to deliver these.

19.10 Connexions services were delivered partially in-house (for intensive personal services) and via Prospects, a nation-wide group that provided advice and guidance to schools including Pathways (some based in schools and some in the community.)

19.11 Prospects was found to be more successful in achieving employment for children and young people than in-house staff. Numbers of those not in education employment or training, NEETs formed a national indicator (NI) target for the Local Area Agreement. In-house provision focussed mainly on general support for NEETs but outcomes such as resilience and confidence were not an NI. It was felt that the focus on jobs for vulnerable young people was in general being lost.

19.12 A 24% cut across all the Connexions targeted services would have ‘wiped out’ some areas of services completely. It was important to agree what was needed to be delivered to schools and vulnerable children and young people. An EIA had been completed on the needs of the most vulnerable groups.

19.13 Following the Cabinet decision, it was decided to negotiate a 25% contract variation with Prospects for 2010-2011. Unexpectedly, Prospects rejected this for commercial reasons that were not clear.

19.14 There were legal complications around Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE). Other local authorities were contacted about their own approach.

19.15 Asked about any lessons for the future, Head of Service, Children and Families said there needed to be clarity with service providers about contract terms including changes in services especially for statutory services. TUPE provisions were fundamentally different depending on the service provider; be they profit-making, non-profit or community organisations, social enterprises or cooperatives.

19.16 This was a very challenging situation for the council as employer and provider of services. An open dialogue with service users was impaired by the employer’s duty to safeguard employees.

19.17 Asked about the outcomes of the Connexions service, Head of Service, Children and Families said an evaluation of the impact of local services could be provided to Members.

19.18 There was a need to help all relevant services to work more closely with children and young people. Children asked about Connexions said their main issues concerned accessibility to the service.

19.19 Members asked how the combined impact of service reductions might impact on particular groups, such as disadvantaged children, and how this could be monitored.

19.20 The Head of Service, Children and Families said it was a challenge to understand fully the issues faced by children and young people in the City. An investigation into the success of

reducing teenage pregnancy indicated that a key factor was the attitude of staff providing the services. Staff were engaged and adopted a positive attitude but the impact was not as it should have been.

There needed to be more engagement with young people about the impact of services provided.

19.21 Regarding the design of youth advisory services, the role of school councils (groups of representative students) was key in giving young people more confidence and a better outcome. Individual young people had to be confident to access services and are likely to have closer involvement when working with their peer groups.

19.22 The Lead Commissioner for Schools Skills and Learning reminded the meeting that schools received funding for information advice and guidance services and whilst they should not be over-loaded, they were well-placed to provide help and support including via mentoring. Acknowledging the important work that had been done by Connexions, the Lead Commissioner for Schools Skills and Learning said that schools had also been undertaking this role and would continue to do so.

19.23 A Panel member asked about diversity of provision of advice and services to young people outside school, for example for those who were not fully engaged with school for whatever reason.

19.24 The Head of Service, Children and Families acknowledged that young people had not engaged with a website that had been aimed at giving accessible advice. Young people tended to regard it as an adult-driven 'sop' and did not want to be 'corralled.' Now young people and looked after children had their own website which is more successful and under their own total control.

19.25 So it has been found that advice and services generally have to be self-guided, though some people will want access to other sources. Better opportunities for disadvantaged children were needed and work with partners was on-going. This includes young people who may on the surface seem 'privileged' but may still be under hidden stresses.

19.26 The Chairman thanked the officers for speaking to the Panel about the challenges of the grant reductions, the large changes in hand, and the growing awareness of young people's needs that would contribute to experience for the future.

20. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION; DRAFT EXTRACT FROM AUTISM SCRUTINY PANEL AND PLAYBUILDER

20.1 The additional information was noted.

21. EMERGING THEMES AND NEXT STEPS

21.1 The aim was to report back to OSC on 14 December.

The meeting concluded at 4.30pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of