

scrutiny

focus on performance

Culture, Leisure & Sport Task & Finish Group Children's and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. Introduction

Each Committee asked their respective Executive Members to attend the first meeting to explain the current status of their portfolio / departmental reviews, giving the Committee an explanation of how confident they were of meeting the budget challenges agreed at Finance Council. Each of the Executive Members was supported by a Strategic / Director. It was anticipated that Scrutiny Committee members would focus their attentions between June and September 2011 on the delivery and outcomes of those reviews; in that the implications of not meeting the required targets would have significant impact on delivering the Performance Agreement from September onwards. It is anticipated that Scrutiny of these reviews will be completed by September. At the Committee's first meeting it was decided that the best way to proceed with Scrutiny in this area was to divide the Committee into three Task and Finish Groups looking at the three individual Portfolios.

Following the first meeting to scrutinise the Culture, Leisure & Sport Portfolio, in which Members had the opportunity to scrutinise Senior Officers, around key and relevant parts of the 'RAG' Report, the meeting agreed on the initial focus and work plan until September 2011. It was decided that they would like to:

- Request the original departmental budget that the cuts were being made against.
- Examine the details of the cuts and further explore the reasoning behind the decisions.
- Investigate the impact that the cuts have had on issues such as, staffing levels and reduction in services.
- Explore the potential longer term impact that the cuts will have on the service areas within the Portfolio.

Whilst undertaking the reviews Members were keen to explore what impacts the cuts would have on both service users and staff.

2. Work Plan : Examining the original Departmental Budgets against which cuts were made

To undertake this Review the Task and Finish group requested that they be able to see the original budgets from which the cuts were made. From the information that was received, activities and services across all three areas of Portfolio were subject to 25% reductions against their original budgets.

The purpose of examining the original departmental budgets against the cuts that had been made was to enable them to see specifically which areas of the Portfolio had been most affected by the cuts. The Task and Finish Group looked in detail at the areas of the Portfolio affected most by the efficiencies and considered the impact that this would have on service users and staff.

3. Reasons Behind The Decisions To Make Certain Budget Cuts

The meeting agreed that they would like to explore further the reasoning around why the decisions to make specific cuts to specific areas of the Portfolio had been made. The first meeting wanted to do this to see if there had been areas of the Portfolio that had been more adversely affected by the cuts than other areas and why this was and what affect this may have on services and the quality of the service.

The Task and Finish Group were informed that the level of cuts for each Portfolio and Department were agreed at corporate level. The Director and Assistant Director for the Portfolio decided as to the size of cuts that needed to be implemented in service areas before Heads of Services drew up their downsizing and transformation plans. The Task & Finish Group was informed that throughout the process Senior Officers sought to minimise the impact and mitigate against any loss to front line services.

4. Impact on Cuts to Service Areas

The first meeting that scrutinised the Culture, Leisure and Sport Portfolio agreed to explore the impact that the cuts had had to the various services in the Portfolio. Members wished to explore this further in order to establish if the cuts would impact on the quality of service being delivered. They were provided with details of the efficiencies that each service area within the Portfolio had to achieve over the first two years and the potential impact of these savings for each area. Members looked at the impact the cuts had on:

- Staff

- Service users
- The quality of service provision

Members also explored the possible opportunities that services had gained as a result of the efficiencies.

Leisure Service

Over the first two years the efficiency target for leisure services has been set at £440k of which £240k has already been saved.

The Task and Finish Group were informed that the impact to this service of these savings would be:

- Different and more flexible ways of working within and across leisure buildings.
- Improved, cohesive and coordinated working across Leisure, Health and Wellbeing.
- The need to look beyond the Borough boundaries, to gain economies of scale.
- Increased community engagement and volunteer involvement.

Library Service

Over the first two years library services need to achieve efficiency savings of £513k. Currently the service has saved £170K, with a further £154k having been identified and actioned but not yet saved. The Task and Finish Group were also informed that the Service still needed to find a further £189k of savings before April 2012.

Members were informed of the impacts to the service these included:

- Reduction in opening hours at all libraries
- Fewer resources being purchased including items such as periodicals and newspapers
- The rural community where the housebound and those with transport issues have difficulty accessing library services.
- Greater use of volunteers to assist with service delivery and help those in rural areas who have travel issues.
- Extending the At Home Service for isolated and vulnerable service users.
- Reduction in purchases of books, audio visuals and spoken word resources.

Potential Opportunities:

The Task and Finish Group were also informed of potential opportunities that may soften the impact of the savings to this area. These include:

- Development of shared services on a regional basis and access to a wider range of resources
- Investigation into Information Technology developments to help streamline service delivery.

Culture & Entertainment

Over the first two years Halls, Catering and Festivals and Events have a target saving of £234k.

As a result of these efficiency savings in this service area the Task and Finish group were informed of the potential impact of this, to the service area, which are:

- No support to voluntary sector events or other events across the Council
- Reduction to the Classic programmes as well as opera now no longer being available.

Potential Opportunity:

Whilst the cuts have led to the reduction in availability of certain programmes within the Borough, they have provided an opportunity for others. The efficiencies have enabled the Authority to work with new, smaller promoters, thus increasing the range of events available. This will also allow for the promotion of local bands as well as Asian Music.

These opportunities will have a positive impact on the quality and choice of service, as well as providing an opportunity for service users to have music and entertainment available to them that they may not have previously experienced. As a result of these changes there will also be an opportunity for local artists and promoters to gain positive coverage.

Arts & Museums

The Task and Finish Group were informed that over two years this service area needs to save £132k. Members were informed that this would have the following impact on the service area.

- Reduction in staffing levels
- Shared service agreement with Burnley Borough Council
- 25% reduction in Arts grant to voluntary sector
- Reduction to opening hours at the Museum and Turton Tower
- Greater use of volunteers now needed in order to allow the opening of Turton Tower.

Community Assets

Over the next two years Community Assets are required to make a saving of £340k. In the course of making these savings there has been an impact on both staff and service delivery. Impacts to the service include:

- Reduction in staffing at Witton Park. The impact of this is that there are now times when there is only one member of staff on duty, which results in potential lone working issues.
- Withdrawal from West Pennine Moor (WPM) partnership
- The Withdrawal of the grant to Blackburn with Darwen Healthy Living. This may have an impact on the Community in which the programme is based.

Young People Services

Cuts had already been implemented to this service, prior to moving to the Culture, Leisure and Sport Portfolio. The service will have experienced a reduction of 26% to its budget between 2010 – 2012.

The impact of the efficiencies made in this area have been as follows:

- Reduction to staffing at all levels of the service area.
- Reduction in programme delivery, leading to a focus on the universal community and neighbourhood offer
- Decommissioning of services has meant that Youth Inclusion Programmes (YIP) and Youth Inclusion Support Panels (YISP) now no longer deliver directly to Young people.
- Funding for Voluntary, Community and Faith Sectors through the Children's Fund has stopped, which has led to the end of the development of discreet projects.

5. Long Term Impact Of Budget Cuts To Services Within The Portfolio

The first meeting to scrutinise the Culture, Leisure and Sport Portfolio also wanted to explore what the impact of the cuts would be to each Service area in 4-5 years time. The Task and Finish Group were provided with the possible long term impacts on each of these service areas as a result of the efficiency savings. It was made clear to the group that the efficiencies had provided the Portfolio with a mixture of positive opportunities to exploit, which may lead to the improvement of services available and also some negatives, which may impact on service delivery and customer satisfaction.

Leisure Service

The Task and Finish Group were informed about the possible impacts of the cuts to Leisure Services over the next 4-5 years and what this will mean for the service: Possible impacts may include:

- A Changed culture and attitude to leisure service operation, provision and product delivery
- More community and volunteer involvement in running services
- Opportunities arising with the opening of community use provision at the new Building Schools for the Future, schools.

Libraries

The impact of the cuts to Libraries over the next 4-5 years will mean:

- More reliance on volunteers
- Less specialist staff
- Opportunity to review new technology to support delivery of library & information services through IT and the internet.

Culture & Entertainment

Over the next 4-5 years the cuts will have the following possible impacts on the Culture and Entertainment Service in Blackburn with Darwen:

- There will be more casual staff covering events
- King Georges Hall (KGH) front doors will be shut more often when no events are taking place
- The opportunity may arise for KGH to be recognised as a focal point for the regeneration of the Town centre evening economy and may also play a key part of the towns “Cultural Quarter”
- Opportunities for greater partnership work.

Arts & Museum Service:

The information that was provided to the Task & Finish Group around the 4-5 year impact on Arts and Museums appears to indicate, that the cuts will have an impact on service quality as well as services available to the public. Officers feel that the impacts to this area will be:

- Reduced access to heritage buildings.
- A reduction in the number of Projects and exhibitions developed.
- Reduction in support for Community Arts and Voluntary Groups.

Community Assets:

The Committee were informed that by withdrawing the funding from WPM this would have an impact in the longer term to service users, as the upkeep of the paths, gates and stiles would not be as robust as they have been.

There is also going to be an impact from the transfer of Community Centres and this may in time result in changes to services that are being offered in the long term.

Draft Recommendations Subject to Committee Agreement

Economies of Scale

1. Share best practice to achieve the required economies of scale that have been set.
2. That the Executive Member for Leisure, Culture and Sport report to the Children's and Health, Overview and Scrutiny Committee when the anticipated economies of scale for the Portfolio are achieved, and continue to report by exception any areas that underperform.

Working Across Pennine Lancashire:

3. That the Portfolio ensures, that there is a robust and cohesive management system in place, that makes certain that all staff working across Pennine Lancashire are aware of protocols and procedures for accessing services outside Blackburn with Darwen.

Leisure Services

4. That the Service undertakes a consultation process with service users which will show how the new ways of working have impacted upon them and report the findings back to the Children's and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Library Services

5. That the portfolio explore more cost effective ways of delivering paper copy resources through the use of digital and Information Technology for public use

Witton Park

6. That the Portfolio actively recruit volunteers to support lone working staff in order to eliminate risks of lone working.

Councillor Michael Law-Riding
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