

APPENDIX F

Policy Scrutiny Committee 20 March 2013

37. Medium Term Financial Strategy 201318: Proposal to Withdraw and Close the Urban Ranger Service

John Bibby, Director of Housing and Community Services

1. presented the Business Case on the proposed changes to close and withdraw the Urban Ranger Service to contribute to the required budget savings targets set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.
2. highlighted the key drivers underpinning the review, as detailed in paragraph 3 of the report and advised on the staff consultation that had been undertaken.
3. gave an overview of the Business Case and highlighted the following:
 - Scope and Objectives of the Review
 - Summary of Existing Services
 - Staffing
 - Proposal Summary
 - Detailed Appraisal Option
 - Staffing Issues
 - Stakeholder Responses
 - Analysis of the Service Implications, Risk and Equality Impact Assessment Implementation Plan
4. advised on the Stakeholder Consultation that had taken place through various Parks Advisory Panels and summarised the responses received.
5. highlighted that a petition had been received and that the lead petitioner had been invited to tonight's meeting to present their views.
6. advised on the staffing implications and detailed the proposal for the deletion of three full time posts from the staffing establishment.
7. advised that the report had been split into two parts, due to some of the information within the report containing "exempt information" relating to the financial details of the affected post holders.
8. referred to the supplementary paperwork circulated at the meeting and highlighted the comments received from staff.

9. concluded that the proposed forecast budget savings from the closure of the service would be £383,830 over the 5 year Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Nikki Hughes, Lead Petitioner

1. advised that a petition had been circulated to object against the Council's proposal to close the Urban Ranger Service and added that local residents were concerned that the removal of the service would impact on the parks and green areas significantly.
2. referred to her own personal circumstances and stressed that the parks/ green areas were valuable assets to the communities, in particular to those who lived in more disadvantaged areas and were unable to afford day trips out for their children.
3. advised that the Urban Ranger Service was a beneficial service and made the community feel safe; and stressed that she was concerned about the safety of children if the service was withdrawn.
4. raised concern that there would be an increase in antisocial behaviour, in particular relating to gangs and drug abuse.
5. referred to the historic issues within Boutham Park regarding antisocial behaviour and littering including broken glass and used needles, which was a health and safety issue; and stressed that the issues would reappear if the Urban Ranger Service was to be withdrawn.
6. added that there were concerns that the Hartsholme Country Park would be used inappropriately and would have a detrimental impact on the campsite.
7. stressed that the Urban Rangers were proactive and felt that their services assisted in disbursing issues before they merged into serious incidents.
8. added that due to the Lincolnshire Police having limited resources they would be unable to apply this more proactive approach to their routine and would only manage issues in a reactive manner.
9. felt that there would be an increase in antisocial, littering, damage to the parks/ green space and risk to users, which would cost the Council more to resolve than retaining the service.
10. requested that the Council reconsider their proposal to close the Urban Ranger service.

Members' noted the comments raised by the Petitioner and asked the following clarification questions to officers accordingly:

Question/ Comment 1:

Members acknowledged the need for the Council to make savings, however, felt the closure of this service would have a detrimental impact on the community and asked if there was a possibility for the Council to provide a reduced service instead of withdrawing the service completely.

Response:

The Director of Housing and Community Services acknowledged members concerns, but felt that it would be unrealistic for the Council to provide a reduced service which was still fit for purpose, due to the nature of the role. He further stressed that due to the current financial situation and the need for the Council to made significant savings; frontline services would be affected.

Question/ Comment 2:

Members felt the removal of the Urban Ranger service would contradict the council's priority of protecting those poorest residents in the city who were affected by the recession, as they would use the parks/ open green spaces; and questioned if the council should identify alternative savings which would not have a negative impact on the council's priorities. They proposed that the Council should instead consider to withdraw the yearly funding to light up the Cathedral.

Response:

The Director of Housing and Community Services advised that the maintenance cost for the Cathedral was around £15k and would not make the significant savings required before 2017/18. He further advised that whilst all services have a link to the priorities, they felt this service did not have a direct link to these priorities.

Question/ Comment 3:

Members were concerned that the police had limited resources and were more reactive rather than proactive; and asked how the parks/ green areas would be managed in the future.

Response:

The Director of Housing and Community Services advised that unfortunately in the current climate, it is not possible to retain the service

given the financial background to the proposal. He outlined the duties of the police and highlighted that the Council still had officers delegated to monitor the parks on a regular basis. He advised that he could not guarantee the same level of response from the council but the sites would be inspected. He added however that these areas would only be monitored during normal office hours and would not be as proactive as the Urban Rangers.

Question/ Comment 4:

Members felt that it was likely that if the Urban Ranger service was removed, the costing for maintaining the parks would be significantly high.

They stressed that the value of complaints and retrospective events due to the loss of the service, would cost the council more than retaining the service, They stressed that there was a risk of tented villages, fires, joy riding and theft of fish.

Response:

The Director of Housing and Community Services advised that the Council had a duty of care to parks/ green spaces users and stressed that if the Council was made aware of an issue the Council would respond accordingly. He stressed that due to the reduction in services, the council would not be proactive and there would be a cost for resolving incidences, for example, removal of broken glass.

Question/ Comment 5:

Members questioned if the Council could obtain sponsorship from local businesses?

Response:

The Director of Housing and Community Services advised that the Council might be able to obtain sponsorship/ funding from local businesses, however, stressed that this was not a sustainable income and there was no guarantee the service could be continuously supported after a year. The Committee were concerned that the loss of the service could have a significant impact on the city. The following alternative recommendation was proposed by Councillor Kerry and seconded by Councillor Clayton-Hewson, which was debated accordingly:

- the Committee supports the receipt of the petition and recommends the Executive accepts the petition and its presentation to Council.

- Committee recommends to the Executive that the proposals in the business case be rejected and that the Executive reconsider the proposal to join the Urban Ranger service and the commons warden service together to provide some kind of cover

RESOLVED that

1. the contents of the petition be noted and the Executive be recommended to forward the Petition to Council for acceptance.
2. the Committee recommends the Executive reject the proposals in the business case;
3. and that the Executive be recommended to reconsider the proposal to join the Urban Ranger service and the Commons Warden service together to provide some savings but which would mitigate the risks across the city if the service was withdrawn completely.