

POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 9 November 2010

Present: Councillor H Steen, (Chair)
Councillors A Barnes, Cheetham (substituting for Milling,) Jackson, Kenyon, Morris, and C Pilling
K Pilkington, Co-opted Member

In Attendance: Carolyn Sharples, Committee and Member Services Manager
Tamzin Percival, Assistant Operations Manager (Parks and Open Spaces)
Jason Foster, Operations Manager
Liz Sandiford, Head of People and Policy
Nick Molyneux, Communications Manager
Councillor Essex, Portfolio Holder, Finance and Resources
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer
Councillors Lamb and Robertson

Also in Attendance 1 Member of the Press

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Milling.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 21 September be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

No urgent items were raised.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair informed Members that the Illegal Eviction and Harassment Policy would now be presented to the next meeting in January.

7. GOVERNANCE MODEL CONSULTATION

The Committee and Member Services Manager presented a report on the review of options for Executive Arrangements, frequency of elections and number of councillors per ward.

Prior to the meeting, Members had received a briefing from the Director of Business explaining the options and timescales for implementing them which was as follows:

- The duty to review governance arrangements is a statutory requirement and a formal decision was required by 31st December 2010, with implementation following the elections in May 2011.
- Frequency of elections can only be reviewed in 2010 for implementation in May 2011 and cannot be reviewed again until 2014 for implementation in 2015. A formal resolution was required by 31st December 2010 if there was to be any changes to the current frequency of elections arrangements.
- Any changes to the number of Councillors per ward would require the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to undertake a review.

The Committee and Members Services Manager gave a brief overview of the consultation process and informed Members that only 4 responses to the consultation had been received.

Resolved:

That the Committee recommend to Full Council the following:

1. Executive Arrangements

Option 1 The Leader and Cabinet Executive Model.

2. Frequency of Elections

Option 2 – Elections by thirds, but with further discussions to be held at Full Council.

3. Number of Councillors per Ward

That consideration on whether to remain with the current system or reduce the number of Councillors be discussed at Full Council.

4. That Members recommend that any constitutional changes required by delegated to the Director of Business in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

8. MEMORIALS ON A GRAVE

The Assistant Operations Manager presented the Memorials on a Grave report which had been re-submitted to the Committee following their request in June for additional information to be considered in relation to procedures for implementing/enforcing the cemetery rules and regulations. Further one to one consultations were held with funeral directors, undertakers and memorial masons to establish the most practical method of ensuring customers were aware of key items within the cemetery rules and regulations. This would allow customers at an early stage to make an informed decision of whether to use Rossendale Borough Council's cemetery and burial service.

The Committee also suggested a bereavement pack be developed to ensure a more customer friendly way of informing customers of key messages with the cemetery rules and regulations. A draft pack was circulated for comment. The packs could be tailor-made for the individual, as it was easier to provide specific information to customers within the packs. The pack would be sent out to the customer as soon as possible following a burial. The cost to produce and send the pack by recorded delivery would be £4-£5 and it may be possible to look at a small increase of burial fees to refund the cost.

Members welcomed the Bereavement pack and its flexibility of use to the individual. There was a need to ensure the Council get the message out to the customer in the right way.

The Operations Manager indicated that there were cemetery staff based in every cemetery in the Borough and they know when to expect memorials to be erected and would keep a check on these to ensure there is no added extras on the memorials. If extras were added the staff contact the Bereavement Officer who would contact the grave owner.

A number of questions were raised by Members to which both the Operations Manager and Assistant Operations Manager responded.

Resolved:

That the Committee recommend to Cabinet that they enforce the existing cemetery rules and regulations (which allow additional memorials to be placed on a small area in front of memorial stone) for all new and reopened graves from a set date.

9. MEMORIAL SAFETY TESTING POLICY

The Assistant Operations Manager presented the Memorial Safety Testing Policy which the Council has a duty by law to maintain the borough's cemeteries and closed churchyards in good order and ensure that systems are in place to control risks from memorials to employees, visitors and others.

Monumental Masons have the responsibility to work within certain standards to ensure memorial stones are erected safe and securely. Many memorial stones in the Council's cemeteries are older than the current standards and so do not conform.

An owner of a memorial has the responsibility to maintain that memorial so that it does not present a safety risk. Consequently, it is necessary to test memorials every five years to ensure that safety is maintained.

Inspections and testings are undertaken by trained Council Officers, on a plot by plot basis in each cemetery focusing on the oldest section with larger memorials first, as these pose more serious consequences should it fall.

There were a number of options available which may influence the financial cost likely to be incurred by Rossendale Borough Council.

- Rossendale Borough Council carry out the repairs and then pursues recovery of all costs from the owner of the “right or burial”.
- Request contribution in part or whole from the owner of the “right or burial”, but repairs carried out at the expense of Rossendale Borough Council.
- State that the owner of the “right or burial” must arrange for and ensure repairs are carried out at their expense.
- Rossendale Borough Council arranges for repairs, ensuring these are carried out and all costs incurred by the council.

A number of funding sources were discussed and the Committee agreed that a ‘bond’ would be an appropriate source of funding, with the bond income being invested solely back in to the making safe and repairs of memorials. This would need to be incorporated into the Policy.

A number of questions were raised as follows, which the Officers responded

- a) Repairing of Graves and would this apply to old graves
- b) Need to evaluate the cost of a ‘bond’ to the customer
- c) How would the bond fund future costs
- d) Does the Council maintain closed churchyards

It was agreed that the Policy would need to be sent to the respective diocese.

Resolved:

1. That the Committee recommend to Cabinet the approval of the Memorial Safety Strategy to include a ‘bond’ as an alternative source of funding when a memorial is erected, the income to be invested solely back in to the making safe and repair of memorials.
2. That all future minor amendments to the policy to be delegated to the Director of Communities and Customer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder.

10. COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The Head of People and Policy presented the Communication Strategy which sets out how the Council will organise and communicate to residents and stakeholders.

The Strategy has been reviewed in light of the medium term financial strategy but also in recognition of the need to explore ways in which the Council can improve the way it communicates with its residents.

Members were presented with a number of options to consider in relation to reducing costs.

There was discussion by the Committee on the different forms of publicity already in place by some Neighbourhoods in the Borough (Community News and What's On Guide) and it was agreed that this was an ideal way to engage with the community.

Resolved:

1. That the Committee recommend to Council that production of any newspaper is ceased completely.
2. That the Council approve the Communications Strategy.
3. That all future minor amendments to the Communications Strategy to be delegated to the Head of People and Policy in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources.

11. FORWARD PLAN (1ST November to 28th February 2011)

The Scrutiny Support Officer informed Members that the following reports would be presented to the next meeting on 18 January 2011.

- a) Enforcement Review Policies
- b) Illegal Eviction and Harassment Policy
- c) Private Water Supplies 2009 Regulation Policy and Fees

The next Forward Plan would be circulated to Members on 15th November and they were asked to contact the Scrutiny Support Officer if they would like to see any additional Policy at the next meeting. The report writer would be asked if this was possible.

Signed.....

Date