

BUDGET SCRUTINY PANEL – 3RD OCTOBER 2017

Extract from notes of an informal meeting held on 19th September 2017 to enable Loughborough Councillors to put forward suggestions for the Loughborough Special Expenses element of the draft budget 2018/19.

For the Panel's information, suggestions which the above meeting agreed to put forward are indicated as titles and descriptions in **bold** type below [suggestions (i), (iv) and (vi) only].

"2. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE LOUGHBOROUGH SPECIAL EXPENSES ELEMENT OF THE DRAFT BUDGET 2018/19"

In agreeing the process for scrutiny of the draft budget 2018/19, Scrutiny Management Board had supported Loughborough Councillors preparing, in advance of this informal consultation meeting, their suggestions for the Loughborough Special Expenses, so that what was being requested and the reasons for and benefits of the suggestions were clearly presented and thought out, to ensure that the consultation was as effective as possible.

Further to the above, the Strategic Director of Corporate Services asked, in respect of each suggestion put forward, that the following be provided where possible: an overview of the suggestion, the issue to be resolved/outcome desired, supporting evidence, whether there had been any discussion on the matter with officers or Cabinet Lead Members.

(i) Councillor Smith – Residents' Orchard, Stapleford Park

This suggestion had been submitted in advance of the meeting.

Funding to purchase approximately 21 small, native fruit trees for a community project to provide a residents' orchard at Stapleford Park, with the blossom and fruit adding interest and enhancing the appearance of the Park. Focus would be on Leicestershire varieties with reference to Leicestershire Heritage Project. Note that ideal planting time is Autumn, although Spring possible.

The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces had provided an initial response supporting the suggestion.

ACTION AGREED

The suggestion be conveyed to the relevant Head of Service and Cabinet Lead Member for consideration for the Loughborough Special Expenses 2018/19, and reported to Budget Scrutiny Panel as part of the budget scrutiny process, with feedback on the outcome to be provided to Loughborough Councillors in due course.

(ii) Councillor Smidowicz – Rapid Response Team

This suggestion had been submitted in advance of the meeting.

Funding to form a “rapid response team” to deal with properties of concern (in relation to untidy properties where mattresses, rubbish, full bins have been left), particularly properties which are not within “known” areas.

Councillor Smidowicz stated that her proposal related also to dangerous parking and that HMO Licensing may address some enforcement needs. Concerns stemmed from the experiences of a number of Loughborough Councillors who received complaints from residents on all of these matters, with those councillors often finding it difficult to get Council officers or the Police to come and look at the problem as it was occurring.

In response, existing provision of services by this Council was discussed, notably Street Wardens and Enforcement Officers and their roles/work, together with how problems could be reported. Dangerous parking was a matter for the Police/Highways Authority. The position in respect of bins being emptied was explained, “missed bins” could be dealt with as soon as reported, but the contractor would not collect recycling bins contaminated with general waste, with notice being left that that should be rectified and advice provided where needed. The Council’s bulky waste provisions were also referred to, together with the need to work with owners to resolve problems (the Council could not simply remove items from private land).

Views were expressed that officers needed to be out and about checking for problems in this area, that it would be useful if an officer was available to meet with ward councillors to look at areas of concern or “hot spots”, and that problems sometimes existed outside areas with the highest student populations.

(Note: The Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces had provided an initial response in respect of the two Contract Officers employed by the Council for Loughborough and their proactive role in monitoring areas, especially areas with high student population, to ensure relevant problems were reported to Serco and cleared in a timely fashion. He had stated that he was not sure that any additional capacity in that area would provide significant improvement. Also, since this meeting Enforcement Managers within Regulatory Services have agreed to complete a walkabout with Councillors (Smidowicz/Parsons) to look at ward specific issues).

ACTION AGREED

The suggestion not be put forward, but that information be provided to Loughborough Councillors as soon as possible setting out in full the arrangements the Council currently has in place for enforcement of the matters outlined (including of HMOs), together with clarification as to which matters are not within the responsibilities of this Council.

(iii) Councillor Parsons – Enforcement Activities

This suggestion had been submitted in advance of the meeting.

Funding to support additional enforcement strategies and activities (Councillor Parsons had stated that he would introduce a number of suggestions within this area which he felt warranted discussion at the meeting).

Further to the above, Councillor Parsons stated that what he had in mind was likely to require more funding than the likely capacity for increased expenditure with Loughborough Special Expenses (outlined earlier in the meeting) could provide, therefore it was not a suggestion he proposed to put forward at this stage. However, he outlined the type of rapid response, 24 hour enforcement provision he envisaged for Loughborough, to include exclusive legal support and additional enforcement officers, and to deal with a range of issues and behaviours which had a significant detrimental impact on local residents on an ongoing basis, to which such prompt and decisive action might act as a public and visible deterrent.

ACTION AGREED

The suggestion not be put forward, but that a broad outline be provided to Councillor Parsons of what might be required to implement his suggestion, including an estimate of the costs.

(iv) Councillor Mercer – Allotments

Councillor K. Harris stated that he was a Council allotment holder in Loughborough and therefore had an interest in this matter.

Increased funding for required improvements to allotment sites, if the need to undertake asbestos removal had had a significant impact on funding previously agreed.

ACTION AGREED

The suggestion be conveyed to the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces and Cabinet Lead Member for consideration for the Loughborough Special Expenses 2018/19, and reported to Budget Scrutiny Panel as part of the budget scrutiny process, with feedback on the outcome to be provided to Loughborough Councillors in due course.

(v) Councillor Miah – Provision of Outdoor Gym, Southfields Park

Funding for Outdoor Gym in Loughborough (Southfields Park providing an appropriate, central location). Such facilities elsewhere were always popular/in use.

In response, the Strategic Director of Neighbourhoods and Community Wellbeing referred to that representing capital expenditure and that it could not

therefore be funded from Loughborough Special Expenses, however the opportunity existed to look at use of Section 106 monies across the town centre, including for Southfields Park.

ACTION AGREED

The suggestion not be put forward, but that it be noted by the Strategic Director of Neighbourhoods and Community Wellbeing for consideration as part of the opportunity outlined above.

(vi) **Councillor K. Harris – Community Garden Grant Fund**

A grant fund for Community Garden groups, however small, to apply to for assistance with the costs of items required for those gardens. Councillor K. Harris referred to two examples within Loughborough Dishley which provided beautiful and valuable community gardens that would benefit from such assistance (named at this meeting as “the three closes either side of Braddon Road” and “behind Cordell Road”). If such a fund was made available, it would be important to publicise that effectively, so that use was made of it.

ACTION AGREED

The suggestion be conveyed to the relevant Head of Service and Cabinet Lead Member for consideration for the Loughborough Special Expenses 2018/19, and reported to Budget Scrutiny Panel as part of the budget scrutiny process, with feedback on the outcome to be provided to Loughborough Councillors in due course.

(Note: Details of the existing Community Grants Fund (Neighbourhood Services) will be circulated to Loughborough Councillors to enable small groups of residents to apply. In addition, the Head of Cleansing and Open Spaces will explore the availability of plants (under the Bloom programme) for such groups. Both may provide alternatives to the above addition to the Loughborough Special Expenses).

(vii) **Councillor Tillotson – Removal of Shrubs, Warwick Way Estate**

Funding for removal of thorny shrubs in the area, which Councillor Tillotson considered were unattractive and unwelcoming and gathered litter, and replacement with suitable environmental improvements. Councillor Tillotson referred in particular to the area “at the bottom of Shelley Street”.

In response, the Strategic Director of Neighbourhoods and Community Wellbeing referred to the opportunity that existed within the Open Spaces contract to access funding for environmental works.

In respect of both this suggestion and the suggestion set out in (vi) above, it was noted that land in housing association or County Council ownership could not receive funding from the Loughborough Special Expenses.

A view was expressed that it was important to involve local residents in any proposed environmental improvements.

ACTION AGREED

The suggestion not be put forward, but that it be noted by the Strategic Director of Neighbourhoods and Community Wellbeing for consideration as part of the opportunity outlined above and Councillor Tillotson be assisted with that accordingly.”