

Feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Overview and Scrutiny 1

Extract of the Minutes of the Meeting of 25 January 2010

Item 10 Draft Budget For 2010-11 to 2012-2013

Gavin Chambers, Head of Finance and Assets, advised that the 2010-2013 draft budget was currently out to consultation. The budget would then be presented back to Cabinet and Council for approval post-consultation. This year, the same process as previously had been adopted for consulting Overview and Scrutiny on the Council's proposed budget. The Reporting and Monitoring Working Group would have been asked to select the issues from the budget proposals for each Overview and Scrutiny Committee but this meeting of the Reporting and Monitoring Task and Finish Group did not take place due to the inclement weather at that time.

Chris Cavanagh, Head of Regeneration, confirmed that Francis Fernandes, Borough Solicitor, had advised the Chair that due to the sensitivity of the issues and an agreed consultation process, it would not be possible for officers to reveal details of budget saving consultation proposals at this stage.

Chris Cavanagh advised that he was currently in discussions with staff regarding the details around the options regarding the restructure of the Regeneration Department. It was reported that it is possible that some of the Committee's questions might relate to individuals, as some posts are only specific to one post etc, in which case such questions could not be answered at this stage.

The Committee queried how comfortable the Council was that the proposed restructure would not impact on the regeneration of the town Chris Cavanagh advised the Committee that that the report had been driven by the Council's overriding need to make savings on its general budget. In terms of Regeneration and Development, a focus on delivery had been adopted in terms of finding options and focus on Council priorities. This had lead to a restructure and focus on delivery of the Council's priority projects and initiatives.

Sue Bridge, Head of Planning, advised that in respect of the Planning Department, there was an intended minor internal structure to strengthen Planning policy, which will pick up some of the policy work done in Regeneration currently. Other proposed changes are in respect of income and operational efficiencies. In response to a query regarding whether the changes would have an impact on planning coming back to the borough, Sue Bridge advised that she had made provision for four additional posts in the establishment, which were not funded this year but were earmarked in reserves, by next year there will be more of a certainty regarding the need for these posts.

Chris Cavanagh suggested that Heads brief Overview and Scrutiny on details of the restructures and savings proposed presenting to a future meeting of

this Committee once the one to one meetings with affected staff have been concluded.

The Committee made comment on two specific proposed options contained in the draft general fund budget 2010-11 to 2012-2013: -

- Savings for community centres of £170,000 may not be realized due to the work of the Community Task and Finish Group
- Concerns were conveyed regarding the proposed savings in the Regeneration and Planning and as to whether this might affect the regeneration of the Town Centre which is a priority for the Town.

The Committee further commented that there does not appear to be much substantiveness behind some of the proposals at this stage. The Committee was disappointed that the Portfolio Holders were not present at this meeting for consideration of this item.

Gavin Chambers advised that should something be taken out as part of the budget consultation process, it would need to be replaced with something else. There is a finite timescale when this process must be completed. The budget papers to Cabinet and Council in February 2010 will show clearly any amendments to the proposals.

The Chair commented on the failure to provide the correct financial information with regard to the proposed savings for Community Centres in the report provided to Committee members.

AGREED: (1) That Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 make the following comments on two specific proposed options contained in the draft general fund budget 2010-11 to 2012-2013: -

- Savings for Community Centres of £170,000 may not be realized due to the work of the Community Task and Finish Group
- Concerns were conveyed regarding the proposed savings in the Regeneration and Planning and as to whether this might affect progress of Central Area Action Plan and delivery of regeneration of Northampton and essential growth.

(2) That details of the proposed savings be presented to a future meeting of this Committee.

Overview and Scrutiny 3

Extract of the Minutes of the Meeting of 1 February 2010

Item 5 DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2010-11 TO 2012-2013

Isabell Procter, Director of Finance and Support, advised that the 2010-2013 draft budget was currently out to consultation. The budget would then be presented back to Cabinet and Council for approval post-consultation.

The Chair advised that this year, the same process as previously had been adopted for consulting Overview and Scrutiny on the Council's proposed budget. The Reporting and Monitoring Working Group would have been asked to select the issues from the budget proposals for each Overview and Scrutiny Committee but the meeting of the Reporting and Monitoring Task and Finish Group did not take place due to the inclement weather at that time.

The Committee asked questions, heard and made comment: -

- The budget process was started in May/June 2009 by producing the continuation budget, which is the current year budget restated at future years price base.
- There has been a significant increase in subsidy due to the significant increase in benefits claims.
- All Directorates were tasked with efficiency savings, i.e. same service for less money, looking at options to help bridge the gap along with service reductions.
- A draft report on the budget was presented to Cabinet in December 2009. This report is currently out to public consultation on the proposed options. The final public consultation meeting is on 4 February 2010. Comments and feedback will then be gathered and presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 24 February 2010 to seek its views on whether any of the proposals should be changed, the budget will then be presented to full Council for approval.
- A risk assessment on the proposal options for the budget has been completed and received by the Audit Committee.
- The budget options are being investigated to ascertain whether there is the need for equality impact assessments.
- The Committee suggested that it should be suggested to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 (Housing and Environment) that it looks at the budget options EFFY97 delivery of phase 1 and EFFY98 phase 2 of delivery plan at its meeting on 8th February 2010. Both budget options contain substantial amounts of proposed savings. Isabell Procter confirmed that these issues had been highlighted for Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 to discuss in depth with the relevant Director at its next meeting.
- In response to a query regarding budget proposal EEFY101 – Savings in facilities staff based on moving out of Cliftonville by 30th May 2010, Isabell Procter advised that the review was going very well. A report was expected from a company who had reviewed and surveyed both

the Guildhall and Westbridge, investigating how space could be configured to fit in staff. The report will comment on whether it is realistic. It was noted that the location of ICT and the server room had been an issue but a very encouraging report had been received on what could be done and how ICT and the Server Room could be relocated. Timescales will not be met by end of May 2010, as issues such as datalines can take around five months to put into place.

- In answer to a query how the Council sourced its providers for utilities, Isabell Procter confirmed that two methods were applied – use framework contracts that have been in place for some time, then the contract would go out to tender or spot testing – the Council buys a certain amount of, for example electricity, at the current price. An advisor assists on this process. The Council is leading on this process, on behalf of five other districts, through the joint procurement process.
- The Committee queried the proposed budget option EFFY82 - Target to reduce agency spend by an additional 1%. Isabell Procter advised that the Council acquires most of its Agency staff through Comensura. The workforce is being looking more closely so that the requirement for Agency Staff can be managed down. The Head of Human Resources manages the employment of Agency Staff. Ways of making savings include shortening the time from when the employee hands in notice to recruiting to that post.
- It was noted that budget proposal EEFY1 related to the deletion of a vacant post in the Head of Performance and Improvement Team. This post had been vacant for over a year. EEFY112 is in relation to restructuring in the policy area, again in the Performance and Improvement Team. The proposal is the reduction of one member of staff. The introduction of Performance Plus has meant that the same level of service can be delivered by the system producing the information.
- Regarding budget proposal EEFY83 Increase debt recovery rates, the Committee heard that this was an efficiency saving and that debt collection had improved. New processes have been put in place.

AGREED: That the Chair writes to the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 (Housing and Environment) advising that this Committee supports the Officer's recommendation that Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 discusses in depth with the relevant Director, the budget proposals - EFFY97 delivery of phase 1 and EFFY98 phase 2 of delivery plan at its next meeting on 8th February 2010.

Overview and Scrutiny 2

Extract of the Minutes of the Meeting of 8 February 2010

9 DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2010-11 TO 2012-2013

Phil Morrison, Finance Manager, advised that the 2010-2013 draft budget was currently out to consultation following the Cabinet meeting of 16 December 2009. The budget would then be presented back to Cabinet and Council for approval post-consultation. He added that this year, the same process as previously had been adopted for consulting Overview and Scrutiny on the Council's proposed budget. The Reporting and Monitoring Working Group would have been asked to select the issues from the budget proposals for each Overview and Scrutiny Committee but the meeting of the Reporting and Monitoring Task and Finish Group did not take place due to the inclement weather at that time. The Committee was invited to consider the proposals and make comment. Any comments made would be annexed to the report to Cabinet at its meeting on 24 February 2010.

The Committee asked questions, heard and made comment: -

In respect of budget proposal - EFF87 – Reduction of Agency budget for cemeteries, Julie Seddon, Director of Environment and Culture, advised that Neighbourhood and Environment Services use Agency Staff. By improving the management of staff, the use of Agency Staff can be reduced, for example multi skilling of staff.

Regarding budget proposal - MTPS41 – removal of grants to BTCV trust, a query was raised about what consideration goes into the removal of grants and whether the Council works with other Agencies and investigates the effect of removal of grants on voluntary bodies. Julie Seddon confirmed that this had been looked at; it is an anomaly, as the service area could carry out the work itself cheaper. If the BTCV still wants to commission work through the Council it should apply through the corporate process, therefore this opportunity is still available to it. BTCV allows voluntary groups to put in applications for funding. BTCV bring in a lot of funding to the town. It was confirmed that it could not be guaranteed that the work would be carried out to the same standard. £19,000 equates to approximately one FTE. Julie Seddon confirmed that she would verify whether the proposal included Choices working on Abington Park.

Regarding budget proposal EFFY19 – Adjustment to budget of clean up of unauthorised Traveller encampments, the Committee queried whether this saving could be sustained considering the fact that illegal encampments are at an all time low and are likely to increase in the future.

In respect of the budget proposal MTPS22 & 4 - Realignment of CCTV sources to focus on crime hotspots, the Committee was concerned that if the CCTV cameras were removed, once removed the area would probably become a crime hotspot again. Julie Seddon advised that it had been endeavoured to remove cameras that had not created a significant impact. The Committee requested a full briefing on the impact of the realignment of the CCTV cameras. This issue has caused a lot of queries to Councillors and it was suggested that a briefing be given to the next meeting of this Committee.

Regarding budget proposal EFFY6 - Removal of bulky waste collection vehicle and use of existing fleet to collect bulky waste, Julie Seddon confirmed that this was due to the removal of the cost of a replacement vehicle and was to no detriment to the service.

Regarding budget proposal EFFY115 – Restructuring of museums, Julie Seddon confirmed that management costs were being investigated. Two posts would be merged. All posts have been challenged which has enabled the proposed restructure.

The Committee heard that at the last meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3, Councillors had discussed the proposed budget options for 2010-2011 to 2012-2013. The Committee referred to the budget options EFFY97 and EFFY98 and felt that these were important, relevant issues for Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 to debate at its next meeting. In response to a query, Julie Seddon advised that Project Produce should go live in 2011. It was being endeavoured that it would be ensured that the market testing and PFI projects link so that negotiations are staying in line. The worst-case scenario was 15,000 miles per year at £10 per hour, however, this is indicative at this time. Julie Seddon advised that in the Spring 2009, it had been requested that a value for money partner be appointed to look at this service area to identify areas where there was potential for improvement and savings. The savings plans are about looking at the way Agency staff is employed, shifts worked, overtime patterns, maintenance schedules, vehicles and machinery – maintenance, purchase and lease, income from recycling and the potential to work on an area basis. It is considering every aspect of the Directorate to ensure it can be as efficient as possible. It has enabled plans to be put in place plans to reduce costs, also ensuring that the service is at the best possible standard before it can be market tested. Anticipated savings are around £1million each year over the next three years. In response to a query, Julie Seddon advised that they are genuine savings, proposals have been well challenged by finance, and the proposed savings are robust. This is not one big contract, it is made up of a number of elements, and therefore there are risks.

The Committee commented, asked questions and heard: -

- It is impossible for the Committee to scrutinize EFFY97 AND EFFY98 at this point due to the proposed savings being a figure without any further details
- The target is radical, but equal weighting has been applied to the level of service provided.
- Councillors David Garlick and Christopher Malpas, together with the relevant Officer, would go through budget proposals EFFY97 and EFFY98 these line by line and report back to the Committee.

AGREED: (1) That Councillors David Garlick and Christopher Malpas would go through budget proposals EFFY97 and EFFY98 these line by line and report back to the Committee.

- (2) That a full briefing on the impact of the realignment of the CCTV cameras be given to the next meeting of this Committee.
- (3) That it be confirmed to the Committee whether budget proposal MTPS41 included Choices at Abington Park.
- (4) That Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 (Housing and Environment) makes the following comments on the following two specific proposed options contained in the draft general fund budget 2010-11 to 2012-2013: -

“it be confirmed whether budget option - EFFY19 – Adjustment to budget of clean up of unauthorised Traveller encampments, could be sustained.”

“It is impossible for the Committee to scrutinize EFFY97 AND EFFY98 at this point due to the proposed savings being a figure without any further details. Councillors David Garlick and Christopher Malpas, together with the relevant Officer, would go through budget proposals EFFY97 and EFFY98 these line by line and report back to the Committee.”