

ENVIRONMENTAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 FEBRUARY 2016

Present: County Councillor Mitchell(Chairperson)
County Councillors Aubrey, Clark, Hill-John, Keith Jones,
Lomax, White and Darren Williams

60 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

61 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

62 : MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2015 were approved by the Committee as a correct record and were signed by the Chairperson.

63 : DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS 2016/17

The Committee received a report on those elements of the Council's Corporate Plan and Draft Cabinet budget proposals for 2016/17 which relate to the service areas which fall within the remit of the Committee. The report included the relevant sections of the Draft Corporate Plan for 2016-18 and the draft Cabinet budget for 2016/17. Members also received details of the changes to the draft budget post-consultation and the impact of the draft budget savings proposals within Directorates.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Hinchey to the meeting and invited him to make a statement. Councillor Hinchey set the context within which the budget proposals were being considered. The Committee was advised that the authority has achieved £200 million savings over the last 10 years; £99 million of the last 3 years. The budget settlement received from the Welsh Government had been better than expected and, whilst the settlement still represented a cut.

The budget consultation process had received 3348 responses. Councillor Hinchey advised that any amendments to the initial draft budget would take into account the Authority's 4 key priorities – namely:

- Better education and skills for all
- Supporting vulnerable people
- Creating more and better paid jobs
- Working together to transform services

It was suggested that the Committee might wish to focus these priorities when considering its lines of inquiry.

Corporate Overview

The Corporate Director Resources provided a corporate overview summary [presentation](#) on the revised draft Cabinet budget proposals 2016/17. Members were requested to comment, raise questions or seek further clarification on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members noted that the cost of meeting the uplift of the living wage equated to an additional £0.5 million. The annual uplift, as calculated by the Living Wage Foundation, was 20p per hour for 2016/17. Members asked whether all schools paid their staff the living wage. Officers advised that school budgets allow for the Living Wage to be paid and the Council commends its payment. However, responsibility for deciding whether to pay the Living Wage lies with the Schools Governing Bodies. Officers were unaware of any instances where schools were not paying their staff the Living Wage.
- The Committee sought clarification on the changes to National Insurance contributions and the increase in the employer's rate. Officers advised that the Government had aligned the rate at which NI is paid for employer pension schemes and 'contracted out' pensions. The two-tier rate at which NI was paid had been removed. These changes would amount to an additional £2.7 million for non-teaching staff, and a similar amount within schools. There were enough funds allocated within the 2016/17 to fund this increase. The budget also provided 100% of the additional funding required by schools.
- Officers stated that it was prudent to continue set aside the £4 million contingency fund to allow for slippage in the level of savings achieved. In terms of achievability, risk analysis has indicated that approximately £4 million savings proposals were in the 'red' risk category.
- Members asked how much overspend there had been on agency spend and how would the levels of overspend be monitored during 2016/17. Officers were anticipating £300k savings on agency spend during the year as a result of improvements to sickness absence levels. Members were reminded the agency staff were only brought in when service delivery demands dictate. The Cabinet Member stated that lots of work had been done to reduce sickness absence within the Environment Directorate from 13 days to (predicted to be) 9.2 days per annum. The new 'fast track' procedure and other improvements to the Discipline Policy would also help reduced sickness absence levels further.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Members and the officers for their contributions.

Transport, Planning and Sustainability

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Patel, Cabinet Member for Transport, Planning and Sustainability; Andrew Gregory, Director of City Operations and Matt Wakelam, Operational Manager, Infrastructure and Operations. Councillor Patel was invited to make a brief statement. Councillor Patel thanked the Committee for the opportunity to address the meeting. Councillor Patel stated that the Welsh Government's settlement was better than anticipated but still represented a cut. However, there was now an opportunity to make resources available to revise Supplementary Planning Guidance, for highways improvements and other project delivery schemes.

The officers delivered a brief [presentation](#) on the Transport, Planning and Sustainability elements of the 2016/17 City Operations budget. Members were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members questioned whether the proposal to increase planning fees income through a combination of increased volume and an increasing in fees was achievable. Officers were confident that the proposed increase was achievable as a considerable number of large applications were anticipated as a result of the LDP and general upturn in the economy. Fees were to be increased by 15%.
- In terms of planning enforcement, Members noted that there were already pressures on the service due to staffing constraints and workload. As there was likely to be additional demands placed on the service, Members sought confirmation that there were sufficient resources in place to provide a robust planning enforcement service. The Committee was advised that there were no plans to reduce the level of resources and officers will be able to deliver the service. Officers stated that the delivery of the LDP will mean that resources from the Policy Team can be realigned. The majority of planning enforcement issues were associated with smaller developments and the introduction of new Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPGs), for example on HMOs, will enable more robust planning enforcement in the city. Members noted that additional SPGs will require additional enforcement.
- Officers confirmed that the Building Control Section did not receive income from the issuing of fines. Enforcement is discharged through the issuing of improvement notices. Fines may be issued as part of criminal proceedings, but these are not returned to the Council.
- The Committee sought assurances on a number of budget proposals including the deletion of vacant posts, the invest-to-save scheme in the Butetown Tunnel, CPE contributions and the reclaiming costs from insurance companies.
- In terms of commercialisation officers advised that Dragon Taxis had made an approach with regard advertising/sponsorship of school crossing patrols. The authority was actively seeking partners on a number of commercialisation initiatives such as advertising on roundabouts.
- Officers advised that Cabinet had agreed to increase the powers available to officers to issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) of up to £100 for offences in the environment. The authority was systematically looking at the enforcement tools available. An Environmental Enforcement Team was currently being assembled and businesses were being notified that enforcement of a range of offences will begin in the next financial year. The introduction of such enforcement would be phased. The Team has a £50k income target for 2016/17.

Environment

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Bob Derbyshire, Cabinet Member for the Environment; Andrew Gregory, Director of City Operations and David Lowe, Waste Operations Manager, to the meeting.

The officers delivered a brief [presentation](#) on the Environment elements of the 2016/17 City Operations budget. Members were invited to comment, seek clarification or raise questions on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- The Committee asked when they can expect to have sight of the proposals for the Alternative Delivery Model (ADM). Officer stated that a Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting would be convened on 12 May 2016 to consider the ADM proposal, prior to a report being taken to Cabinet. The Cabinet Member stated that he was confident the proposed budget savings could be realised irrespective of how the Cabinet decides to deliver the service in the future.
- Members sought clarification on the proposal to generate revenue from littering fines. The Committee was reminded that, as advised previously, Cabinet intends to bring in a private enforcement partner. The service would be self-financing and any profit made would be shared with the Council.
- The Committee asked whether there had been any progress regarding the possible provision of a re-use/recycling facility, and whether such a facility would bring in an income. The Cabinet Member advised that negotiations with 3rd sector organisations were ongoing. However, it was not anticipated that a re-use facility would generate income, but such a facility would help increase recycling rates.
- The Committee discussed the financial pressures detailed in the report, particularly those brought about by the reduction in grant funding from the Welsh Government. Members were advised that the income from recycle markets was not good and this was decreasing year on year.
- Officer confirmed that the City Centre street washing still took place but the service had been consolidated and did not take place as often.

AGREED – That the Chairperson writes on the Committee's behalf to the Cabinet Member to convey their comments and observations.

64 : ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Principal Scrutiny Officer provided an update on the forthcoming meetings, joint meetings and Task and Finish Inquiries. Councillors Clark and Williams volunteered to participate in the s.106 Task and Finish Inquiry.

65 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members were advised that the next meeting of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee is scheduled for 15 March 2016 at 4.30pm in CR4, County Hall, Cardiff.

The meeting terminated at 4.00 pm