

**Wiltshire Council**

**Council**

**23 February 2016**

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**Special Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee  
Report on Proposed Amendments for the 2016-17 Budget**

**Purpose of report**

1. To report to Full Council a summary of the main issues discussed at the special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee held on 12 February 2016. This was convened to consider proposed amendments from Opposition Groups to the budget recommended by Cabinet on 9 February 2016.

**Background**

2. This special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee provided an opportunity for non-executive councillors to question Councillor Glenis Ansell, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, as the only group to submit proposals to the Committee, on her group's proposed amendments before the budget is considered by Full Council on 23 February 2016.
3. The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group gave a presentation covering the proposed amendments to the Executive's budget. She made the following comments:
  - The proposals had been accepted as legal and financially deliverable by the council's Corporate Leadership Team in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer.
  - The group had aimed to add value to the work already undertaken by the Executive and officers in a challenging financial environment, setting out areas of further potential savings and priorities for further investment the group had identified.
  - These included reductions in catering and the council's fleet of vehicles, and additional funding through the rural services grant.

**Main issues raised during questioning and debate**

4. The Chairman invited the Leader of the Council and other Executive Members to respond to the amendments to lead off discussion, before opening up to general queries from the Committee and other Members in attendance.

Leader's response

5. The Leader of the Council, Councillor Baroness Scott of Bybrook OBE, commented upon the proposals, detailed fully below, stating they would be looked at closely ahead of Full Council, although at this stage the potential savings and investment had not

raised significant policy concerns, and been cleared by the officers. The Cabinet Member for Finance confirmed that view.

#### Consideration of amendments (investments)

##### Investment in 'Pause'

6. Pause is a national initiative to reduce the demand/cost placed on Children's Services by working with families who have experienced or are at risk of repeated removal of children from their care in an attempt to break that cycle. A national pilot scheme is currently running.
7. The Liberal Democrat group's proposal was to invest £0.125m into the initiative, funded with savings as detailed at paragraphs 12-17.
8. The Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Laura Mayes, stated the initiative appeared worthwhile subject to further consideration.
9. The Committee discussed the amendment, including the current impact on families and particular children as well as the cost to the council of repeatedly taking the children of certain families into care, and the accompanying financial as well as societal benefits if this could be addressed with such an initiative. Members were informed the investment was a cost to get the initiative running in Wiltshire, and that feasibility studies with other local authorities had shown significant savings in following years as a result of successful implementation.

##### Adaptations and Equipment for Adults with Learning Disabilities

10. The Liberal Democrat group's amendment was to provide play and leisure equipment for adults with learning disabilities to reflect the growing population and enable greater development through play and work alongside care and leisure services. This would require a revenue investment of £0.100m to fund capital borrowing which would result in a capital investment of £0.469m.
11. The Committee discussed the proposals including the type of specialist sensory equipment this would provide, with details sought on the interest repayments required on any borrowing.

#### Consideration of amendments (savings)

##### Catering

12. The Liberal Democrat group's proposal was for Officers to review the current net cost of catering across all services (£0.289m) to look at pricing, controls, procurement etc. in order to reduce the spend and introduce commercial pricing in areas from the County Hall and Monkton Park facilities, as well as frontline services such as Leisure or activity centres such as Braeside in Devizes. This would seek to identify savings of £0.050m.
13. The Executive responded by stating there were no objections to reducing the budget if council approved.

14. The Committee discussed the proposed review and identification of savings, requesting details of any impacts particular in centres servicing external customers. It was clarified that beyond the Monkton Park and County Hall facilities little of the catering at other locations was under contract, and it was suggest many units might benefit from tighter controls on spend.

#### Vehicle Fleet

15. The Liberal Democrat group's proposal was to reduce the council's vehicle fleet by at least one further vehicle, saving an additional £0.025m on top of the the administration's proposed savings of £0.200m
16. The Committee discussed the proposal, seeking details of the current fleet and impact of existing Executive proposals and the additional proposal, as well as how much staff travel was undertaken using the vehicle fleet and if a reduction was viable.
17. It was reported that the majority of fleet costs related to vehicle maintenance rather than staff travel, but confirmed the further level of saving was achievable if supported by Council.

#### Rural Services Grant

18. The Liberal Democrat group's proposal was to utilise £0.150m of the rural services grant uplift as detailed by the Cabinet Member at the beginning of the meeting as a contribution towards funding the above investment proposals. The details of the final settlement figure from central Government would be included in a revised financial plan report to Council.

#### Consideration of amendments (policy)

##### Good Neighbour Scheme

19. The Good Neighbour Scheme consists of individuals who advise residents in rural areas and signpost them to relevant support services, and is operated by Community First.
20. In December it was decided to devolve responsibility for the scheme to Area Boards from April 2016, as detailed in [Councillors Briefing Note No.272](#).
21. The Liberal Democrat group's proposal is to reverse that devolution, claiming that valuable funding streams would be lost as a result.
22. The Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Public Health responded stating that the contract for this service with Community First was ending on 31 March 2016 following appropriate consultation and did not accept that the amendment was cost neutral. However the arrangements for implementing the decision to delegate responsibility for the scheme to Area Boards could be reviewed by Scrutiny.

23. The Committee discussed the proposal including whether there were specific budget implications, potential loss of operating knowledge and the alignment to the principle of increasing delegation for local provision to Area Boards. The Committee felt that the offer for scrutiny engagement was a positive one.

## **Conclusion**

24. That Council take into account the comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in considering the proposed amendments to the financial plan 2016-17.

**Councillor Simon Killane**

**Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee**

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