

Full Council

21 February 2017

**Special Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee
Report on Proposed Amendments for the 2017-18 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 14 February 2017. This was convened to consider proposed amendments to the initially published administration budget proposals.

Background

2. This special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee provided an opportunity to scrutinise amendments to the budget that were proposed after the committee meeting on 1 February 2017, which considered the initial proposals from the administration which were published on 24 January 2017.
3. At Cabinet on 7 February 2017 Councillor Baroness Scott of Bybrook OBE, Leader of the Council and Leader of the Conservative group, proposed a series of amendments to the budget as previously published, and which Cabinet then resolved to recommend to Council on 21 February 2017. As these changes had not previously been scrutinised, it was agreed they would be taken to the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Management on 14 February 2017.
4. Following the Cabinet meeting Councillor Glenis Ansell, Leader of the Liberal Democrat group, submitted on behalf of her group a series of amendments to the budget as proposed by Cabinet, for consideration and scrutiny ahead of the Council meeting on 21 February 2017.
5. Both sets of 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.
6. The amendments submitted by Baroness Scott on behalf of the Administration and subsequently agreed by Cabinet were as detailed in agenda supplement 1 to the meeting, and as summarised below:
 - To limit the reduction in grant funding for VisitWiltshire to £0.050m rather than £0.100m;
 - To increase investment to the Wiltshire Parent Carers Council (WPCC) by £0.050m;

- To extend the opening hours at Household Recycling Centres (HRC) in Salisbury, Trowbridge and Chippenham by one day a week from April to October requiring an additional investment of £0.175m;
 - An additional £0.100m to be invested in staff development.
 - The proposals were to be funded by further reducing the marketing and communications budget by £0.175m; and
 - £0.200m of preventative property maintenance to be funded through allocated whole life capital funding, allowing that amount to be directed toward the amendments.
7. The amendments submitted by Councillor Ansell on behalf of the Liberal Democrat group were as detailed in agenda supplement 1 to the meeting, and as summarised below:
- To fund an additional opening hour for all HRCs in Wiltshire for the entire length of the year, at a cost of £0.200m.
 - This to be funded by reducing the budget for professional subscriptions, fees and conferences from that proposed by £0.150m; and,
 - To extend the procurement savings target identified in the administration budget by an additional £0.050m

Main issues raised during questioning of and discussion on the proposals from the Conservative group

8. Following presentation from the Leader of the Conservative group, the Chairman for the meeting sought queries and comments from the Committee and any other Members in attendance.
9. In her presentation Baroness Scott explained that preparing a budget was a lengthy and demanding process, and during that process and as further information became available, a number of issues that required further consideration were identified, and the amendments had been proposed to address these.

Consideration of investments/decreases in reductions

Visit Wiltshire

10. The amended budget proposed a smaller reduction to the grant awarded to Visit Wiltshire than that originally suggested, with a total reduction of £0.050m rather than £0.100m.
11. Baroness Scott and the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Skills, Strategic Transport and Strategic Property, Councillor Fleur de Rhé-Philippe, stated the proposal had arisen following additional discussions with Visit Wiltshire on the likely impact of the initial £0.100m reduction on their efforts to encourage and support tourism to Wiltshire, an industry which provided over 29,000 jobs.

12. The Committee discussed the amendment, noting the work that Visit Wiltshire undertook, and seeking details of how their effectiveness was monitored and therefore how the smaller reduction would enable them to perform their role and so the impact of that smaller reduction could be assessed. It was also clarified for the avoidance of doubt that this was not a proposed increase in investment to Visit Wiltshire, but simply a smaller grant reduction than initially proposed.

Wiltshire Parent Carers Council (WPCC)

13. The amended proposal was to increase investment to the WPCC by £0.050m to enable employment of another member of staff and increased support. The WPCC is an independent, voluntary organisation managed and run by parent carers providing information and events for parent carers and working in partnership with the council and other organisations, in particular relating to Special Education Needs.

Health and Recycling Centres (HRC)

14. Baroness Scott stated the administration had been reviewing data in relation to the HRCs for some time and latest visitor data suggested that at the three main sites there was a need to increase investment to enable an additional opening day during the spring and summer to ease issues of traffic queueing on the highways. This would require additional investment of £0.175m.

Staff Development

15. The proposal was to invest an additional £0.100m to improve the council's learning and development offer, increasing access to coaching and mentoring. Baroness Scott stated availability to learning and development had been a key issue identified through a recent staff survey which the investment would seek to address.

16. The Committee discussed the proposal, seeking details of the reductions that had already taken place in the staff development budget in previous years, as well as details of what the £0.100m might be able to fund and how many additional staff would be able to undertake additional training, as well as how the progress would be monitored by members.

Consideration of savings

Marketing and Communications

17. Baroness Scott introduced the proposal, which was to reduce the marketing and communications budget by an additional £0.175m. While it remained important for people to be informed of the council's work, discussions had taken place to identify further savings that could then fund the additional investments and grant reductions proposed.

Preventative Property Maintenance

18. The proposed that £0.200m could be focused on other spending by reprioritising work in property maintenance out of the whole life capital funding budget.
19. Details were sought during discussion on how the additional £0.200m had been identified as available following further due diligence on the annual capital maintenance programme, rather than additional revenue funds, and it was confirmed that the full amount would be available to fund the proposed increased investments and decreased in grant reductions.

Main issues raised during questioning of and discussion on the proposals from the Liberal Democrat group

20. Following presentation from the Leader of the Liberal Democrat group, the Chairman for the meeting sought queries and comments from the Committee and any other Members in attendance.
21. In her presentation Councillor Ansell stated she was glad the administration had chosen to revise its budget in recognition of issues that had been highlighted, and that her group had proposed an additional amendment to further address concerns.

Consideration of amendments (investments)

HRCs

22. The proposal was to fund an additional hour of opening for all HRCs in Wiltshire all year, requiring an additional £0.200m
23. The Committee discussed the amendment, seeking details of how the cost had been calculated and confirming that the stated investment would permit an additional hour at all sites including the additional day proposed for the three HRCs in the Administration's amendment.

Consideration of amendments (savings)

Professional Fees and Subscriptions

24. Details were provided in the agenda supplement on the overall budget for provision of past payments in relation to professional subscriptions, professional fees and conferences attendances, which it was proposed to reduce by £0.150m.
25. Details were sought on the impact of the proposed reduction, in particular in relation to staff development, and it was stated there had been an underspend in 16/17 of nearly £0.150m and that after careful analysis the Liberal Democrat

group believed the reduction would not reduce officer capacity, and that no existing subscription or conference currently attended would be cancelled. It was stated discussions would need to be had with the relevant associate directors to assess any potential impact.

Procurement savings

26. The proposal was to increase the savings target for procurement from £0.250m to £0.300m, which the Liberal Democrat group believed to be an achievable target given those accomplished in previous years.
27. The Committee and members discussed the proposal, with details sought on which areas of procurement might yield the additional £0.050m targeted in order to fund the proposed investments.

Conclusion

28. That Council take into account the comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in considering the proposed amendments to the financial plan 2017-18.

Councillor Alan Hill
Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (in the Chair on 14 February 2017)

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