

SPECIAL JOINT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

ON THE DRAFT 2010-11 BUDGET

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To feedback to the Council a summary of the main issues made at the special joint meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Select Committees held on 16 February 2010.

BACKGROUND

2. The Budget and Performance Task Group (of the Management and Resources Select Committee) agreed that the new unitary council should hold a joint overview and scrutiny meeting to review the draft budget for 2010-11. This practice compliments Scrutiny's monitoring of the budget throughout the year and is regarded as a model of good practice.
3. The joint meeting provided an opportunity for all non-executive Councillors to question the Leader and Cabinet on the content, pressures and rationale of the draft budget before it is put to the full Council for agreement.
4. The Executive representatives introduced the main budget headings prior to responding to questions.

MAIN ISSUES RAISED

5. Overall Budget

- a) **Executive rationale** - the Leader of the Council set out a number of the key considerations which the Executive took into account when recommending the budget:
 - The budget is based on preserving front line services despite continued challenge from the budget settlement.
 - Results of the consultation process informed the budget preparation.
 - Wiltshire's average council tax increase would be 2.3% achieving harmonisation on band levels.
 - Built into the budget were efficiencies of £25m, with an additional fund of £3.3m for invest to save.
 - Provision had been made for 0.5% staff salaries and 0.75% for general inflation.
- b) **General fund reserves and invest to save** – movement in reserves was explained and invest to save commitments reported with £800k for ICT and £300k generally remaining to be allocated.
- c) **Headroom** - no commitment had yet been made to the allocation of the £212k.
- d) **Pensions** - a breakdown of the figures would be provided.

6. Department for Children & Education

- a) **Special Educational Needs (SEN) Transport** - had been increased by £0.3m from 2009-10 to compensate for the current overspend. The service was also under review.

- b) **Extended Services** - the cost reduction (£0.986m) was due to the cessation of grant funding from Central Government for start-up of the scheme. There was £1.7m remaining for sustaining the scheme in 2010-11.
- c) **Sure Start** - it was confirmed that the budget was entirely grant funded.
- d) **Social Care Court Proceedings** - the rise from £150 to £4,825 per case reflected associated work levels linked to recent high profile child protection cases, changes in legislation and financial support from government.
- e) **Youth Services** - budget details to be provided.
- f) **Targeted Services and Commissioning & Performance** - breakdown to be provided.

7. Department for Community Services

- a) **Personal Care at Home Bill** - if implemented could lead to additional budget pressures of approximately £800k for 2010/11.
- b) **Provider Contracts** - assurance was given that although efficiencies had been identified with provider contracts, it did not mean quality of care would be affected.
- c) **The Joint Commissioning Board** - was NHS Wiltshire and the Council working together to commission services effectively. For example as part of the Dementia Strategy a PFI was being considered for the building of 2 new homes and 3 mobile units.
- d) **Community Leadership and Governance** - a breakdown to be provided with particular focus on the costs of Area Boards and the use of last year's £300k funding for community projects.

8. Department for Neighbourhood and Planning

- a) **Tourism** - confirmation that £697k was allocated within the budget for tourism. Cabinet would be considering in September how tourism is supported by the authority.
- b) **Development Control** - staff savings had been made by not filling vacancies; this had also been countered by increased productivity following a lean review. The council's reserves would act as a contingency for increased numbers of planning applications or appeals.
- c) **Climate Change** - the majority of the £400k budget was staffing costs but this would benefit from a business case. An outline response by the Council to meeting Government requirements had been considered by the Environment Select Committee in November. £500k savings identified through procurement of the street lighting reflected the increased buying power of the unitary authority.
- d) **Waste Collection** - the Waste Collection reduction in costs (£379k) would be achieved mainly through rationalisation of collection rounds. The consultation exercise on the future of waste services and any subsequent policy change would be deferred until after the general election.

- e) **Waste Disposal** - contract negotiations for the MBT plant in Westbury were progressing with a report to Cabinet in March but further details would be provided.
- f) **Public Transport** - a review was being undertaken by Mouchel which it was hoped would identify potential savings. The Park & Ride sites in Salisbury were costing the authority £1m, although complimentary uses of spare capacity at the sites were being explored to generate further income.
- g) **Rights of Way** - the budget reflected the high cost of by-way disputes and the requirement to maintain a definitive map.
- h) **Leisure** - the 5% increase in charges for leisure use was prudent in this current financial year. It was confirmed that funding for the contracted gyms currently supported by the authority would be retained for 2010/11. A report to Cabinet on reviewing the service was planned for the summer. Information on the replacement programme for gym equipment was requested.
- i) **Parking** - information to be provided on the HGV provision within parking services.

9. **Department for Public Health and Wellbeing**

- a) **Efficiency Savings** - the Department has been restructured twice with the main addition recently of Community Safety. Savings had come from staffing costs associated with 1C4W at a managerial level.

10. **Department of Resources & Chief Executive**

- a) **ICT** - significant investment was being made (£17m plus £3m invest to save) in order to support the development of the new council.
- b) **HR** - growth reflected in provision of extended leadership and management development programmes.
- c) **Corporate Items, Shared Services, and Policy & Communications** - increases in the budget reflected a more centralised approach but more details would be supplied.
- d) **Workplace Transformation** - the level of unsupported borrowing (£45m) over the next three years as part of the capital programme was considered prudent for the authority. Savings made through Workplace Transformation would then be used to offset this in the long term.

CONCLUSION

- 10. The Council is recommended to take into account this summary of the main issues raised at the special joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committees when determining the budget and council tax for 2010-11.

Cllr Jeff Osborn
Chairman – Joint Overview & Scrutiny Select Committee