

Wiltshire Council

**Cabinet
12 February 2013**

**Council
26 February 2013**

**Special Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee
Report on the Draft 2013-14 Budget**

Purpose of report

1. To feed back to Cabinet and Full Council a summary of the main issues discussed at the special meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee held on 7 February 2013.

Background

2. This special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee provided an opportunity for non-executive councillors to question the Leader and Cabinet on the draft 2013/14 budget before it is considered at Cabinet on 12 February 2013 and Full Council on 26 February 2013.
3. The Director of Finance gave a presentation covering the key components and influences on setting this year's budget. He explained that the Budget Task Group has previously been through the technical aspects and the minutes of that meeting have been circulated. Messages in his presentation included:
 - Council tax has been frozen again for a 4th year and there is a commitment there for the same in 2014/15 even with a continued reduction in funding from central government.
 - Balancing the budget is dependent on procurement savings, some of which have already been achieved.
 - Central government funding has been adjusted and has had a negative impact in Wiltshire, despite lobbying undertaken by Group Leaders.
 - Better analysis of the movement in the budget for Safeguarding children has resulted in an investment to meet anticipated demand, part of which will be managed through earmarked reserves.
4. Carolyn Godfrey spoke on behalf of the Corporate Leadership Team describing how the 2013/14 budget was formulated and the challenges faced in achieving a balanced budget, but also the positive things that will be delivered.
5. The Leader of the Council gave her thanks to Michael Hudson and his team, and reiterated the information around procurement and commissioning, which

has meant that less severe measures have had to be applied than was first anticipated in the business plan. Listening to communities and the Transformation Programme were delivering significant benefits.

6. Councillor John Brady spoke on the format and production of the reports, and in particular:
 - That it has been redesigned to be much more 'user-friendly'.
 - Thanks were given to Overview and Scrutiny and in particular the Budget Task Group for their challenge throughout the year.
 - A new, more scientific way of looking at the budget has been developed by Michael Hudson and his team, including the management of reserves to minimise the need for mid-year virements.

Main issues raised during questioning and debate

7. The rural grant lobby had been announced on the evening of 5th February 2013. Wiltshire has secured an additional grant with the 4th highest award available due to lobbying and our rural position.
8. Welfare reform is reflected in the base of all budgets including children's services. There are joint projects in place with the voluntary sector and other agencies, and most Wiltshire families that could be effected by these changes have been identified by the Council. Investment in economic development and the job market are key to encouraging people to be less dependent on welfare.
9. A key public priority is highways maintenance, which is seeing an increase in capital spending from £18.7 million to £21.4 million in order to maintain and keep the infrastructure together.
10. It was confirmed that the Budget Monitoring Report to Cabinet will see extra spend in 2012/13 due to pressures faced and this £300,000 is grant for flooding and is additional money.
11. Amendments were made to the savings figures for libraries, heritage and arts on page 10 of the appendices to the report:
 - Staff restructures and savings (Libraries): £135,000
 - Stop performing arts service (Libraries): £9,000
 - Reduce stock fund: £185,000

It was explained that performing arts are being moved to the arts service, resulting in a reduction in funding. The University College London is responsible for the future funding of Victoria County History. Resources remain to complete the Warminster volume. Discussions are being held on potential models of funding for the future.
12. Appendix G on Development Services welcomes improved provision and enforcement of Section 106 agreements. An acknowledgement was made of

the work done to improve this to the benefit of the authority and local communities.

13. It was highlighted that the savings information provided for many of the services in the budget book (appendix C) does not reflect how and where the savings will be achieved. Rather, there are generalised references to reviews or restructuring. Cabinet Members confirmed these would not impact on frontline services.
14. Some reductions in funding within the savings in the budget book (appendix C) will result from improved partnership working and there was a request for this to be more transparent in future reporting.
15. It was confirmed that the proposed budget does not require a reduction in the number of open access youth centres, and again the focus needs to be on effective partnership working.
16. Some of the Disabled Facilities Grant has been transferred to the housing associations by central government.
17. Details of the £4.5 million procurement savings are to be made available to members, showing what has been delivered and any potential areas of risk.
18. The car parking investment stated in the 'washing line' diagram was clarified as a reduction in income due to policy decisions around free day allocations, rather than a direct investment into development of car parking services.
19. It was requested that future reporting avoids excessive abbreviations.

Conclusion

20. Cabinet and Full Council are asked to take this summary of the issues raised at the special scrutiny meeting into account when finalising the budget and council tax for 2013/14.

Cllr Trevor Carbin
Chairman –Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee

Report Author: Teresa Goddard, Scrutiny Officer, 01225 713548.