

Item 5b

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1

Council Chamber,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Tuesday,
25 January 2005

Time: 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor B. Meek (In the Chair) and

Councillors Mrs. K. Conroy, Mrs. A.M. Fleming, D.M. Hancock,
J.G. Huntington, J.M. Khan, G. Morgan and K. Thompson

Invited to attend: Councillors R.S. Fleming and Mrs. B. Graham

In Attendance: Councillors Mrs. B.A. Clare, V. Crosby, G.C. Gray, Mrs. J. Gray,
J.E. Higgin, T. Ward and J. Wayman J.P

Apologies: Councillors W.M. Blenkinsopp, A. Gray, B. Hall, K. Henderson, J.M. Smith
and Mrs. I. Jackson Smith

OSC(1).27/04 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members had no declarations of interest to declare.

OSC(1).28/04 BUDGET FRAMEWORK 2005/06

Consideration was given to the Cabinet's initial budget proposals in respect of Resource Management, Performance Management and Welfare and Communication portfolios. Members gave detailed consideration to a report setting out the basis of the proposals and in particular the proposed changes in service provision for each portfolio. (For copy see file of Minutes).

Cabinet Members with responsibility for Portfolios under consideration had been invited to attend the meeting in order to respond to questions from the Committee.

The Cabinet had agreed its initial budget on 13th January 2005 (Minute CAB 130/04 refers) and as part of the budget setting procedure Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been asked to consider the proposals with a view to making recommendations to Cabinet before it made its final budget proposals to Council.

The Committee noted that detailed budgets had been prepared, based on inflation and price increases as outlined in the report.

Resource Management

Members noted the overall position in relation to the Capital and Revenue proposals for the Resource Management Portfolio.

It was reported that as a consequence of major land sales in 2005/06 external investment income would significantly increase by

approximately £1m. These additional resources would allow the Council to invest in revenue services to deliver on its priority areas over the next few years.

Reference was made to the additional resources of £50,000 that had been provided to support the promotion of equality and diversity in particular the appointment of a Corporate, Equality and Diversity Officer.

Members' attention was drawn to the fact that the Council would receive £25,000 of external Government funding for Emergency Planning and Civil Contingencies.

Specific reference was also made to the major changes to the Standards framework for Members that enabled the Standards Board to refer cases to the Council's Monitoring Officer for investigation. The change would obviously involve expenditure, however, the amount could not be accurately quantified, as the number of referrals was unknown. A contingency provision of £50,000 had been made. It was, however, anticipated that reflecting the national position, 50% of the complaints could relate to Parish and Town Councils and £25,000 may therefore be recovered from those authorities.

Members questioned whether the average pay increase of 2.95% was subject to Union agreement. It was however, explained that this had previously been negotiated with the Unions as part of a 3 year pay agreement.

Performance Management

Members noted the overall position in relation to the Capital and Revenue proposals for the Performance Management portfolio.

It was explained that the ICT budget reflected the increased establishment approved by Cabinet in July 2004 and the ongoing revenue costs associated with maintaining existing computer equipment and systems.

It was also pointed out that an E Government Officer had been appointed to help deliver the ever increasing range of 'E' targets and initiatives.

Members were of the opinion that the implementation of E Government should lead to potential savings for the Council and questioned how this was reflected in the 2005/06 budget proposals.

It was explained that in accordance with the Councils Medium Term Financial Plan, all areas of Council spending were expected to achieve efficiency savings of £500,000 by the end of 2007/08. It was pointed out however, that efficiency savings in the 2005/06 financial year were limited. The Director of Resources emphasised that all Local Authorities must work together effectively in order for efficiency savings to be made.

With regard to procurement, Members queried when the Council would see any financial return. It was explained that the Council was working with other Local Authorities and was a member of the North East Purchasing Organisation and the North East Centre of Excellence.

It was reported that the Council had introduced a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System, which provided the Customer Services Section with access to all systems throughout the Council. It was anticipated that the deployment of the CRM system would bring the Council closer to meeting its customer service objectives.

Welfare and Communications

Members noted the overall position in relation to the Capital and Revenue proposals for the Welfare and Communication portfolio.

It was explained that the increase in training costs reflected the Councils commitment to extend and enhance quality to the Member and Officer core. Some Members were of the opinion that a proportion of the training budget should be used to provide out of hours training for Members.

It was reported that following the comprehensive review of the Customer Services Centre, additional management posts had been included in the revised staffing structure, approved by Cabinet in July 2004. This would involve staff being transferred from benefits and council tax sections in order to improve customer services. Major building works were being undertaken within the reception area to provide suitable accommodation for staff and improve access.

Following detailed consideration of the budget proposals for the Welfare and Communications portfolio, Members were in full support of the proposals.

RECOMMENDED: That the budget proposals in relation to Resource Management, Performance Management and Welfare and Communications for 2005/06 be approved.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Miss L. Moore Tel 01388 816166 Ext 4237

This page is intentionally left blank