

# Item 5c

## SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2

Conference Room 1,  
Council Offices,  
Spennymoor

Wednesday,  
26 January 2005

Time: 10.00 a.m.

**Present:** Councillor J.E. Higgin (Chairman) and

Councillors B.F. Avery J.P, Mrs. J. Croft, M.A. Dalton, T.F. Forrest,  
Mrs. L. Hovvels, G.M.R. Howe, Mrs. E.M. Paylor, J.K. Piggott, T. Ward  
and J. Wayman J.P

**Tenant Representative**

A.McGreggor

**Invited to attend:** Mrs. A.M. Armstrong, R.S. Fleming, J. Robinson J.P and W. Waters

**In Attendance:** Councillors Mrs. B.A. Clare, Mrs. K. Conroy, V. Crosby, G.C. Gray,  
Mrs. J. Gray, J.G. Huntington, Mrs. I. Jackson Smith, G. Morgan and  
A. Smith

**Apologies:** Councillors J. Burton and G.W. Scott

### **OSC(2).28/04 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were received.

### **OSC(2).29/04 BUDGET FRAMEWORK 2005/2006**

Consideration was given to the Cabinets' budget proposals in respect of Culture and Recreation, Housing and Supporting People. Members gave detailed consideration to a report detailing 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 13<sup>th</sup> 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 on the following basis: -

- Average pay and price increases of 2.75%
- Increase in charges of 3% on average
- Allowances for inflation had been restricted to the following area of spending: -

Salaries and wages

Business rates

Insurance Premiums

Utilities Costs

Other unavoidable costs, which were of a contractual nature

### **Culture and Recreation**

The Director of Resources explained that in accordance with the medium term financial plan, in the main, Leisure Services had been provided with an inflationary increase. Additional resources had, however been provided for the full year running costs of Locomotion and the development and co-ordination of activities for young people.

Specific reference was made to a number of changes in service, which included provisions for GP referrals, mobile skate park, promotion and advertisement, leisure centre bars, Fishburn and Shildon pools, Locomotion, play equipment and leisure services department.

Members expressed concern at the Cabinets' 20<sup>th</sup> January 2005 decision to close the swimming pool at Thornhill Gardens, Shildon. Members queried the statement that the pool was underused and expressed concern that a number of groups, as well as school children used the facility and would now have to travel further a field to find such an amenity.

The Director of Leisure Services explained that since Sedgefield Borough Council agreed to be responsible for the pool running costs had increased significantly. The pool had had to be closed on a number of occasions, therefore no revenue was received at those times. Following recent leakage problems the pool was currently drained and out of use. It was pointed out that the user groups and Primary Schools had been relocated to a neighbouring facility.

It was concluded that the matter should be referred back to Cabinet with a request that the decision to close the pool be reconsidered.

The Committee also expressed concern at the proposed removal of the budget provision for the Mobile Skate Park. In response it was explained that although the Town and Parish Councils had initially made a financial contribution that had now come to an end. It was also pointed out that operational difficulties had been unable to be resolved.

Officers also explained that the provision of alternative facilities – to replace the Mobile Skate Park - for young people would be examined.

It was concluded that this issue should also be reconsidered by Cabinet.

### **Housing**

It was reported that the proposed budget for Housing General Fund Services was £624,000 for 2005/06. In the preparation of the budget the following price increases were assumed :-

- Increase in garage rents by 20p from £4.90 to £5.10 per week.
- Homelessness charges would increase in line with DWP thresholds from £142.64 to £147.63, an increase of 3.5%.

Members' attention was drawn to the specific changes in service provision within Neighbourhood Services, Homelessness and Housing Advice and Private Housing Regeneration Initiatives.

Members also noted that the Housing Revenue Account had been prepared on the assumption that there would be no use of the Housing Revenue Account balances in 2005/06. It was pointed out that the budget did not include any cost implications, which might arise from the forth coming ballot relating to transfer of the Council housing stock.

Specific changes to the service provision were also outlined.

Members noted that the proposed rent increase for 2005/06 would be in line with the subsidy settlement of 4.03%. This would have the impact of increasing the average base rent by £1.97 per week (47 weeks). Rent restructuring would continue to be applied at the rate of + or - £1.

Following detailed consideration of the budget proposals and clarification of intended changes in service provision relating to the Housing Portfolio, Members endorsed the budget proposals.

### **Supporting People**

Members noted the overall position in relation to the Capital and Revenue budget proposals for the Supporting People Portfolio.

The submitted report clarified the position in relation to a number of specific budget changes relating to benefits, training and employment services, Sure Start, independent living and financial assistant.

During the discussion reference was made to the new Sure Start Children's Centres that would be developed. It was requested that information be provided on location and development of the centres to Committee Members.

Specific reference was also made to the grant, which the Council provides to Sedgefield Advice and Information Service (SAIS). It was pointed out that at its meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2004 Overview and

Scrutiny Committee 2 had agreed that the Council should continue to fund the SAIS. During the discussions on this issue, Members considered the recent recommendation of Cabinet that discussion should be held with SAIS with a view to reducing the contribution because of the implications of continuing to part-fund the grant from the Housing Revenue Account. Members discussed what level of funding should be provided for 2005/06 and felt that this should be maintained at the current level.

*RECOMMENDED: 1. That Cabinet reconsider the following budget proposals:*

- a) The decision to close the swimming pool at Thornhill Gardens, Shildon.*
  - b) The decision to discontinue operation of the Mobile Skate Park.*
- 2. That Council continues to fund the Sedgefield and District Advice and Information Service at the current level.*
  - 3. That subject to recommendations 1 and 2 above, the budget proposals in relation to Culture and Recreation, Housing and Supporting People portfolios for 2005/6 be otherwise supported.*

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**ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Miss S. Billingham Tel 01388 816166 ext 4240