

Item 5d

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3

Conference Room 1,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Thursday,
27 January 2005

Time: 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor V. Crosby (Chairman) and

Councillors D.R. Brown, Mrs. B.A. Clare, G.C. Gray, Mrs. J. Gray,
M.T.B. Jones, J.P. Moran, B.M. Ord, R.A. Patchett, Mrs. C. Potts,
A. Smith and Mrs. C. Sproat

Invited to attend: Councillors A. Hodgson, M. Iveson and K. Noble

In Attendance: Councillors A.M. Armstrong, Mrs. K. Conroy Mrs. J. Croft, R.S. Fleming,
Ms. B. Graham, D.M. Hancock, B. Meek, G. Morgan, Mrs. E. Paylor and
T. Ward.

Apologies: Councillor Mrs. L. Smith

OSC(3)20/04 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
No Declarations of Interest were received.

OSC(3)21/04 BUDGET FRAMEWORK 2005/2006
Consideration was given to the Cabinet's initial budget proposals in respect of Environment, Regeneration and Community Safety portfolios. 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 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 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 areas of spending:-

Salaries and wages.
Business Rates.
Insurance Premiums.
Utilities Costs.
Other unavoidable costs, which are of a controlled nature.

Environment

Members noted the overall position in relation to the Capital and Revenue proposals for the Environment Portfolio

Overall the budget for the protection of the environment was being increased by £223,000 in real terms to reflect the level of priority given to these services by the Council.

In relation to refuse collection the budget reflected the continuing reduction of the use of the skip service.

The budget also provided for an introduction of a second green waste round and assumed the recycling credits generated would be paid to this Council by Durham County Council.

An increase had also been included in the budget to assist in improving street cleansing standards and also improving standards in the horticultural service.

Other budget heads including Pest Control and Sustainable Communities would continue to operate on the same basis as previous years.

In response to a query raised by Members in relation to the operation and monitoring of the Horticultural Service, the Head of Environmental Services explained that during the current year there had been an increase in supervision and monitoring. There had also been additional bulb and tree planting together with substantial work to shrub beds. Next financial year the service would be looking to invest in grass cutting and shrub bed maintenance. The Committee was also informed that a report was to be prepared regarding the contract which was to expire this year and with a view to extend the contract. A Strategy was to be drawn up relating to the specification requirements etc., of the contract.

Members also raised a query regarding the standard of the grass cutting service and the need for it to be monitored closely if more money was to be invested in it. Officers explained that there had been significant reasons why there had been problems with the grass cutting service operation this year. However, those problems had been resolved towards the end of the year.

Clarification was also sought by Members in relation to the budget when compared to last year's. It was explained by the Director of Resources that the cost of last year's restructuring exercise had been

contained mainly in the Resource Management Portfolio. The base figures had therefore been adjusted to reflect this and to be more closely aligned with the service budgets.

In relation to Street Cleansing concerns were raised by Members regarding the need to monitor the service more rigorously to ensure that the additional investment was giving value for money. The Committee was informed by officers that as part of the restructuring exercise the number of supervisors involved in the Street Cleansing operation had been increased from 2 to 3. The service had also been involved in the cleaning of graffiti and the introduction of machines for the removal of chewing gum. The service had also worked in partnership with other agencies such as Police and Community Force to target particular areas. New geographical satellite equipment had also been purchased. Local residents were also to be involved in the monitoring of the service.

Reference was also made to employees costs in relation to the Pest Control Service and clarification was sought. Officers explained that the costs related to a Support Officer for a three month period and that full time Pest Control Officer costs were reflected in the environmental services budget.

Regeneration

Members noted the overall position in relation to the Capital and Revenue proposals for the Regeneration Portfolio

Specific changes in service under this heading included an increase in the industrial estates budget head to ensure that there was an increased occupancy of industrial units.

Members also noted that in respect of planning services the level of planning delivery grant was assumed at £114,100. It was noted, however, that additional grant may be allocated on the basis of the Council's performance within the service against national targets.

With regard to Single Regeneration Budget 5 Projects, initiatives were to be finished at the end of the financial year. The budget provision had been included for evaluation of the Programme which would be offset by SRB5 Grant.

Additional funding for the SRB Town Centre Management Initiative would enable the Council to support the final year of the Town Centre Management Initiatives and the delivery of One North East Major Centres Programme.

Following detailed consideration of the budget proposals and clarification of intended changes in service provision for the Regeneration Portfolio Members were in full support of the proposals

Community Safety

Members noted the overall position in relation to the Capital and Revenue proposals for the Community Safety Portfolio

The changes in service in this area included the funding of two new posts under Community Safety Management – Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator and Clerical Officer. It was noted that additional income of £5,000 had been secured in respect of management and administration of domestic violence posts.

The budget for Neighbourhood Wardens had been significantly enhanced and showed an increase in service of £107,680 for 2005/06. Provision for six additional Wardens and one Warden Co-ordinator had been included in the Budget. Two Wardens would be funded in full by Great Aycliffe Town Council.

It was noted that the Revenue Budget also included for annual subscriptions, maintenance etc., of equipment. Savings would be made by reducing the number of Warden vehicles from five to three. Members were also informed that the security check/alarm monitoring service had ceased and would not be included in the 2005/6 budget.

There was also a saving excluding inflation increases of £23,970 for the Control Room/CCTV. This was the result of savings achieved on the new CCTV Maintenance Contract additional monitoring and income from Wear Valley District Council as a result of winning a contract to monitor calls in respect of their out-of-hours service.

Members of the Committee queried the change in role from Community Force to Neighbourhood Wardens Service. The Head of Neighbourhood Services explained that there had been a fundamental change in the service in that it had become more community based. The issues were around fear of crime rather than actual crime therefore the service needed to be re-engineered to a high profile, visible service at times when the public perceived their presence was needed. Wardens had also undertaken specific training programmes and had recently received accreditation from Durham and Cleveland Constabularies in recognition of their joint working with the Police. The Wardens had enforcement powers and powers to issue fixed penalties. However, the service was more about educating the community.

A query was also raised by Members in relation to the increase in the domestic violence budget. It was explained that there had been a specific post created for dealing with the provision of accommodation for victims of domestic violence.

General Budgetary Questions

Members also raised concerns regarding the increase in Council Tax which could be a burden particularly to the elderly, who, through having small private pensions, may not qualify for benefits and therefore found it difficult to meet the increase. The Director of Resources explained that the increase for the Borough Council next year would be 3%. Of

course the impact of increase from precepting authorities would also need to be taken into account and the details would be reported to full Council on 25th February, 2005.

RECOMMENDED: That the budget proposals in relation to Environment, Regeneration and Community Safety Portfolios 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. North Tel 01388 816166 ext 4237

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