

# Item 4b

## SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1

Council Chamber,  
Council Offices,  
Spennymoor

Tuesday,  
24 January 2006

Time: 10.00 a.m.

**Present:** Councillor A. Gray (Chairman) and  
Councillors Mrs. K. Conroy, D.M. Hancock, J.G. Huntington, J.M. Khan,  
B. Meek, G. Morgan, Mrs. I. Jackson Smith and K. Thompson

**Invited to attend:** Councillors R.S. Fleming, Mrs. B. Graham and D.A. Newell

**In**

**Attendance:** Councillors Mrs. B.A. Clare, V. Crosby, J.E. Higgin, Mrs. L. Hovvels,  
M.T.B. Jones, J.P. Moran, B.M. Ord, Mrs. E.M. Paylor, Mrs. C. Sproat,  
T. Ward, W. Waters and J. Wayman J.P

**Apologies:** Councillors Mrs. A.M. Fleming, B. Hall, K. Henderson and J.M. Smith

### **OSC(1).34/05 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members had no declarations of interest to submit.

### **OSC(1).35/05 BUDGET FRAMEWORK 2006/07**

Consideration was given to Cabinet's initial budget proposal in respect of Resource Management, Welfare and Communication and Performance Management 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 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2006 (Minute No: CAB.115/05 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.

Members were reminded that the budget framework 2005/06 had been significantly increased as the result of major land sales. As no major land disposal receipts were anticipated during 2006/07 the revenue budget for investment income showed a reduction of £90,000.

Specific reference was made to the job evaluation process. The financial implications were estimated to be in the region of £550,000. It was explained that £350,000 would be provided within the General Fund and a figure of £200,000 was set aside in the Housing Revenue Account.

Members queried how accurate the estimated costs were. It was explained that the impact of the proposed pay and grading structure had been fully assessed in cost terms on an individual employee basis but was subject to both UNISON and GMB union ballots.

Discussion took place in relation to the Housing Revenue Account. It was explained that although housing stock had reduced as a result of the Right to Buy, the budget had been increased in order to reflect the additional resources made available through subsidiary arrangements and the need to achieve the Government's Decent Homes Standard by 2010.

### **Welfare and Communications**

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

It was explained that the increase in training costs reflected the Council's commitment to extend and enhance quality training to the Member and officer core.

Reference was made to the development of the Customer Service Centre. It was explained for example that staff from Benefits and Council Tax sections had now been transferred into the Customer Service Centre.

Members questioned whether the Council planned to update Inform magazine. In response it was explained that the Leader of the Council was scheduled to meet with the Press and Public Relations Officer week commencing 30<sup>th</sup> January 2006 to examine how Inform compared to similar publications.

### **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 continued investment in ICT and e-Government initiatives would enable the Council to build on the achievement of BV157 and continue to make significant progress towards meeting Priority Service Outcomes.

Discussion took place in relation to efficiency savings that the Council was required to make in line with the Gershon agenda.

It was explained that not all efficiency savings were cashable. Efficiency gains could be made through improving performance or productivity e.g. reduced sickness levels.

The Cabinet Members then left the meeting for the Committee's formulation of its recommendations.

Following detailed consideration of the budget proposals Members supported the proposals in general. A minority of Members raised concern in relation to Inform and Job Evaluation.

*RECOMMENDED : That the budget proposals in relation to Resource Management, Performance Management and Welfare and Communications Portfolios for 2006/07 be approved.*

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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 Mrs. L. Walker Tel 01388 816166 Ext 4237

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