

Item 4d

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3

Council Chamber,
Council Offices,
Spennymoor

Thursday,
26 January 2006

Time: 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor V. Crosby (Chairman) and
Councillors Mrs. B.A. Clare, G.C. Gray, Mrs. J. Gray, M.T.B. Jones,
J.P. Moran, B.M. Ord, A. Smith and Mrs. C. Sproat

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

In Attendance: Councillors R.S. Fleming, Mrs. B. Graham, A. Gray, B. Hall,
D.M. Hancock, J.E. Higgin, A. Hodgson, J.G. Huntington, M. Iveson,
G. Morgan, K. Noble, R.A. Patchett, Mrs. E.M. Paylor, T. Ward and
W. Waters

Apologies: Councillors B.F. Avery J.P, D.R. Brown, Mrs. C. Potts and Mrs. L. Smith

OSC(3)23/05 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
No declarations of interest were received.

OSC(3)24/05 BUDGET FRAMEWORK 2006/07
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 12th 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.

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 £327,940 or 7% 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 growing number of domestic properties within the Borough and the need for additional resources to carry out refuse collection to those new properties.

In respect of Waste Recycling it was noted that Durham County Council had withdrawn recycling credits for the Green Waste Scheme and the initial budgets recommended the withdrawal of the rounds in the pilot area within Newton Aycliffe.

Since the initial budgets were prepared, however, the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) had awarded the Council a grant of £71,950 for 2006/7 and £75,350 for 2007/8 of which 50% had to be allocated to works of a Capital nature. Officers had not yet determined how the Waste Performance Efficiency Grant awarded by DEFRA would be allocated. A further report would be submitted to Cabinet outlining options.

With regard to Street Cleansing the budget had been increased to assist in improving cleansing standards and the Horticultural Services budget had been increased to assist in improving standards and included additional resources for plant and equipment.

The budget also made provision for two Civic Pride teams to raise the standard of street cleansing and the environment throughout the Borough.

Other budget heads such as Pest Control, Miscellaneous Health Services and Sustainable Communities would continue to operate on the same basis as in previous years.

The Capital Programme budget would be prioritised towards bin replacements etc.

Members of the Committee made reference to the Grounds Maintenance Contract and the need to ensure that Best Value and Best Quality was achieved. It was explained that the contract had been extended to January 2007. Horticultural Services etc., would be reviewed prior to the contract being awarded. It was considered that new contractual arrangements should achieve an improved service.

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 the relocation of Economic Development staff

based at Newton Aycliffe Business Centre to the Council Offices at Green Lane with resultant savings.

It was noted that additional rental income had been obtained through the rental of a managed workshop located near Shildon Business Centre.

In respect of Planning Services it was noted that in 2005/6 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had raised planning fees by around 30% and a further 10% increase was expected in 2006/7 which would result in an anticipated fee income of £105,000. The level of Planning Delivery Grant was assumed at £260,000.

It was also noted that an increased revenue budget of £14,600 had been allocated to maintain the Borough's town centres.

The Capital Programme for 2006/7 for the Regeneration budget had been set at £600,000, £400,000 of which had been allocated to Regeneration and £200,000 to Economic Development. The Programme would be prioritised towards the Town Centre Improvement Programme, Neighbourhood Renewal, Conservation and improvement works to Council Industrial Estates.

In addition, the Council had already resolved to make 100% receipts from housing land available to meet the regeneration and affordable housing initiatives. No significant receipts of this type were expected during 2006/7. In view of this, and the fact that a project team was still being recruited, a budget of £3,750,000 had been made available to support spending and special regeneration projects. A detailed report, setting out how the allocation would be used, would be prepared.

During discussion of this item reference was made to Town Centre Management and the role of the Town Centre Manager. It was explained that the Town Centre Manager's role would become more involved in dealing with capital works to realise benefits in the town centres.

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 a transfer of the contribution towards Emergency Planning to the Resource Management Portfolio budget with a consequent saving of £13,000.

The budget for Neighbourhood Wardens had been significantly enhanced to reflect the incorporation of 6 wardens previously funded by external finance which now needed to be funded by the Council's own budgets. It was noted that there was a total provision of 22 wardens compared to 11 only 3 years previously.

Members were informed that the increase in the budget also reflected a fully restructured Control Room at Chilton Depot with a move away from the current integrated control room for both CCTV and Carelink Alarm

Monitoring Services towards two stand alone services. The restructure would allow an improved level of service to be provided.

The budget also reflected a full review of CCTV monitoring costs and provision for new business growth during 2006/7.

It was noted that the Domestic Violence budget was fully funded from external grants and contributions and provided for the employment of a Domestic Violence Co-ordinator, an Outreach Worker and a part time Outreach Worker.

During discussion reference was made to the provision for capital spending and it was queried whether the additional £75,000 identified in the budget was sufficient to undertake the improvements in service identified. It was explained that the amount at this stage should be regarded as a contingent provision until the outcome of a comprehensive review of the CCTV requirements had been completed, A further report on detailed spending requirements was expected shortly.

It was noted that there were other areas of activity including partnership working, working with the Police and County Council, Tenancy Enforcement Team, Neighbourhood Wardens, etc., which were being undertaken. It was considered that there was a need to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the service.

A query was also raised regarding the role of Neighbourhood Wardens in enforcement and in particular the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices. It was explained that between October and December 2005, 24 Fixed Penalty Notices had been issued. There was, however, a need to afford individuals the opportunity to address the issue on the first offence. However, if subsequent incidents occurred, Fixed Penalty Notices would be issued.

General Budgetary Questions

A query was raised regarding the increase in Council Tax which the increased expenditure would necessitate. It was explained that the anticipated increase in Council Tax was 3%. It was noted that the biggest part of the Council's expenditure was in the area of the wages bill which, after taking in to account an increase related to the implementation of Single Status, the increase for inflation and also an increase to meet pension provisions, was expected to increase by around 7%. As a result zero Council Tax was not an option and even a 3% increase would mean the use of balances to maintain the levels of service.

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

Following detailed consideration of the budget proposals Members supported the proposals whilst noting that in respect of the Community Safety Budget a review of services would be undertaken.

RECOMMENDED : That the budget proposals in relation to Environment, Regeneration and Community Safety portfolios for 2006/7 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 Liz North 01388 816166 ext 4237

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