

Item 3

REPORT TO PROSPEROUS AND ATTRACTIVE BOROUGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24TH JANUARY 2008

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

Portfolio: PROSPEROUS AND ATTRACTIVE BOROUGH

BUDGET FRAMEWORK 2008/09

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 Cabinet approved the Budget Framework for 2008/09 at its meeting on the 10th January 2008 and recommended that the Budgets are now consulted upon in accordance with the timetable previously approved by Cabinet on the 20th December 2007.
- 1.2 This report therefore sets out for consultation, the proposed 2008/2009 Revenue and Capital Budgets for the Strategic Leadership Portfolio, which falls under the responsibility of the Strategic Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.3 The Budgets have been developed after taking into account the Government's proposed settlements in relation to Revenue Support Grant (RSG), Housing Subsidy and Capital Allocations, proposed use of balances and the proposed increase in the Borough Council Tax.
- 1.4 Detailed account has also been taken of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), which sets out the framework for developing annual revenue and capital budgets over the medium term.
- 1.5 In overall terms, the Budget Framework for 2008/09 maintains service delivery in key priority areas in accordance with the approved Corporate Plan and Transition Plan. Efficiency savings and re-engineering of existing service delivery will enable some changes to occur and keep the level of Council Tax increase to only 3%, whilst at the same time proposes to maintain an overall capital programme of £20 million.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That this Overview and Scrutiny Committee provide feedback to Cabinet on the proposed Budget Framework for 2008/2009 in respect of those services within the Prosperous and Attractive Borough Portfolio's.

3. BUDGET FRAMEWORK 2008/2009

3.1 The Government's proposed settlements in relation to the following key components of the 2008/09 budget have now been received although allocations through the Regional Housing Board are still to be announced:-

<u>Spending Area</u>	<u>Government Settlements</u>
<i>General Fund Services</i>	<i>Local Government Finance Settlement</i>
<i>Housing Revenue Account</i>	<i>Housing Subsidy Determinations</i>
<i>Capital Spending Programmes</i>	<i>Supported Capital Allocations</i>

3.2 Management Team has carefully assessed the implications of the settlements and has examined all main spending areas particularly to consider:-

- The balance between spending on statutory services and discretionary services.
- The allocation of resources between priorities to achieve our strategic goals and performance targets.
- The needs of the public as expressed in previous consultation exercises, particularly through previous Council Tax Focus Group meetings.
- The balance between spending and taxation/rent levels.
- The sustainability of the Budget Framework in relation to its dependency both on the receipt of large sums of money from the disposal of land and external time limited grant funding streams.
- The impact of efficiency savings achieved and the overall need to demonstrate that value for money principles have been applied

3.3 The Council has been provisionally notified that it will receive £9,971,348 of external Government support for 2008/09. The grant system now focuses more on grant distribution and not on national measures of spending and council tax. The system consists of four separate funding elements unchanged for 2008/09 as detailed below:-

- *Relative needs amount (based on amount per head adjusted to reflect local circumstances including deprivation and area costs).*
- *Resource amount (to take account of different capacities to raise council tax).*
- *Central allocation amount (allocated on a per head basis).*
- *Floor damping amount (to help ensure all authorities receive a minimum increase in grant).*

- 3.4 Although the latest Government Finance settlements are regarded as the worst in the last 10 years, by some commentators, it was broadly in line with expectations following the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) 2007 announcement by the Government in October 2007.
- 3.5 Generally Shire Districts received the lowest increase for any type of authority [the grant floors being the lowest since their introduction] less than half of all Shire Districts in the country had had an increase in excess of the absolute minimum 1% floor increase for 2008/09.
- 3.6 The grant settlement for Sedgefield Borough shows a year on year cash increase in grant of 1.98% or £190,065 including the base adjustments in accordance with the distribution framework. As well as being a harsh settlement it also falls well short of meeting the financial pressures facing the Council, particularly in the area of pay related costs. The settlement due on 1st April 2008 has not yet been agreed, but an assumed 2.5% increase has been built into the budgets. Furthermore an Actuarial revaluation of the Pension Fund has recently been completed and though the final outcome has still to be notified, the County Treasurer is advising that employer's contributions are expected to increase by an additional 1% of the cost of employee's contributions during 2008/09.
- 3.7 In addition a number of initiatives designed to build and maintain strong cohesive communities in order to tackle deprivation and social exclusion have relied on external finance streams many of which draw to a close by March 2008. Account has therefore had to be made of the fall out of grant / support in these important areas. As part of the changes brought about under CSR07 the Government has introduced a range of Area Based Grants. One of these grants, the Working Neighbourhood Fund replaces the Neighbourhood Renewals Fund and some of this funding will be applied where on-going schemes meet the criteria of the new Fund.
- 3.8 Whilst fuel price inflation significantly added to the Council's costs [particularly in the areas of high-energy use e.g. leisure centres.] during 2007/08 contract prices have over the last few months seen a downturn in prices. However more recently commentators are now predicting a further round of price increases of up to 15%, which have been factored into the Budgets.
- 3.9 Arrangements are being made with Durham County Council to use their Energy Management Team to manage and monitor energy and water consumption across this Council's property portfolio. Their design services group will also undertake a detailed survey of each of the main buildings and identify specific opportunities for plant efficiency improvements.
- 3.10 The Budget Framework for 2008/09 has been prepared to take into account the above financial issues and pressures and to reflect the Council's key priorities set out in the Corporate and Transition Plans. The key changes can be summarised as follows:-

All Portfolios

Revenue Budgets

- 3.11 The budget has been prepared on an outturn basis which means that the Contingency sum has been eliminated. If during the year unforeseen issues arise they will have to be met from efficiency savings within the relevant Portfolio area to avoid Balances having to be used.
- 3.12 It is expected that the Budgetary Control reports now being considered by Cabinet on a regular basis may identify whether any savings in any Portfolio area could be used to meet any urgent additional unexpected demands on the Council's resources.
- 3.13 The provision for savings arising from staff turnover has been increased to reflect the current position.
- 3.14 This will be the last budget round for this Council to determine before local government in County Durham is re-organised from April 2009. The budget has been prepared on the basis of business as usual but with growth in service provision restricted to essential areas only and where these would not be to the detriment of the new authority arrangements.
- 3.15 Although several other requests have been made to enhance service provision they have been excluded from the budget framework as the shortage of funds do not permit their inclusion. However, it is proposed that subject to funds becoming available during the year the excluded items may be allowed to commence but on a prioritised and considered basis and subject to Cabinet approval.
- 3.16 The annual efficiency targets set by central government are no longer required from 2008/09 resulting in no formal requirement to identify and report cashable and non-cashable savings. They have been replaced with a single efficiency indicator full details of which are still being clarified. The 2008/09 budget framework has been prepared on the basis of identifying efficiencies during the initial preparation of spending forecasts in order that a workable but affordable budget is prepared. The government's revenue support grant settlement assumes cash releasing efficiency savings of 3% will be achieved.
- 3.17 It will be noted that savings amounting to £545,890 have been identified within the Prosperous and Attractive Borough portfolio budgets and have helped to offset the £627,380 unavoidable growth in these services.
- 3.18 In addition to the features set out above, the detailed budgets have been prepared on the following basis: -
- 4.5% anticipated savings from staff turnover.
 - Increase in fees and charges of 3% on average.
 - Allowances for inflation have been restricted to the following areas of spending:-
 - *Salaries and wages*
 - *Business rates*
 - *Utilities costs i.e. gas, water, electricity and telephones*
 - *Other unavoidable costs which are of a contractual nature*

- 3.19 Details of the Council's overall General Fund Revenue Budget are attached at Appendix 1. An explanatory note is attached at Appendix 2 that provides a definition of the various terms used in the budget documents. The detailed budgets in respect of the services within the Prosperous and Attractive Borough Portfolio's are also attached at Appendices 3 to 6.

Prosperous and Attractive Borough Revenue Budgets

Environment

- 3.20 Protection of the environment and the standard of **ground maintenance** has always been a high priority for members and it continues to be a key feature raised by residents in public consultation exercises. The 2008/09 revenue budget will enable the Council to continue to provide a similar level of service to that being achieved in the current year, but with the following enhancements: -
- 3.21 The **Kerbside Recycling Service** was re-tendered during 2007/08 with a start date for the new contractor [Greencycle PLC] of the 1st April 2008. The new enhanced service will now deal with a broader range of recyclates including cardboard and plastics and this will help the Council achieve its statutory recycling targets.

Planning & Development

- 3.22 Protection of the physical environment is one of the issues that is given high priority by our communities. During 2008/09 the **Planning Service** will be enhanced to provide a more customer focused service, maximise fee generation and Housing Planning Delivery Grant as a consequence of improvements in planning performance.
- 3.23 Funds allocated during 2007/08 towards the cost of the review of the Council's **Local Development Plan** have been redirected to provide new elements of the overall plan to ensure it is sufficiently robust and evidence based to pass through the public examination process.

Social Regeneration

- 3.24 The 2008/09 revenue budget will enable the Council to continue to provide a similar level of service to that being achieved during the current year including the ongoing support to the **Advice & Information Service, CAVOS** and the **Local Strategic Partnership**.
- 3.25 The costs of providing the **Housing Benefits service** previously kept within the grant allocations from the Department of Works and Pensions has for the second year running seen a real cut in the level of grant support creating a risk that the level of performance could be adversely affected. Innovative ways of carrying out the service continue to be considered and efficiency measures, such as home working that is currently being piloted in the section, will need to be extended in order to maintain the current level of performance. Preparations have commenced to introduce the new **Local Housing Allowance Scheme** from 1st April 2008 for tenants of private landlords.

- 3.26 With effect from 1st April 2008 the existing **Concessionary Travel Scheme** will be extended to allow older and disabled people to access off peak local travel anywhere in England. This represents a significant change from previous statute which only offered free travel to those eligible within the boundaries of the Borough. The Government has set aside a total £218m to fund the changes to the scheme. This amount is being distributed as a specific grant and Sedgefield has been awarded a £207,000.
- 3.27 As members are aware, however, the scheme currently in operation within County Durham already provides users free travel both within the County and adjoining areas. This was agreed with the bus companies at the time of the last change effective from April 2006. The benefits of the existing scheme actually exceed the statutory minimum outlined in the latest changes. Discussions with the bus companies on the introduction of the new scheme, particularly around maintaining the existing benefits for those in the county Durham scheme, are underway but are not yet finalised. An estimate of the financial impact has been incorporated into this report.
- 3.28 Funding, previously available from the Neighbourhood Renewals Fund ended in 2007/08 and it is being replaced with a new funding stream known as **Working Neighbourhoods Fund**. The exact purposes for which this new funding can be used are still being considered however the sum of £2,099,339 has been allocated to this Council for 2008/09, with additional funds for 2009/10 and 2010/11 which will be paid to the new Unitary Authority. In addition it will be still be necessary to maximise the potential funds available from those funding streams pooled through the Local Area Agreement, in order that the Council can continue its involvement in cross cutting initiatives such as employability and the economic regeneration of the Borough.

Learning & Employment

- 3.29 The budget proposals for this Portfolio should enable the Council to provide a similar level of service to that being achieved during the current year especially in relation to **economic development and industrial promotion**.
- 3.30 The Council continues to provide a **training scheme for unemployed youths & adults** to improve their basic skills to enable to help them find entry to employment. The scheme, funded mainly from training contracts from the Learning and Skill Council and Job Centre Plus, is self-financing. The Council will also continue its close relationship with Bishop Auckland Technical College to develop a strategic alliance with the aim of providing enhanced training facilities locally as identified in the Transition plan.

Revenue Services Summary

- 3.31 Careful planning of the budget means that the commitment made in the MTFP to restrict council tax increases to 3.0% can be delivered in 2008/09. The investment in Council services will add only £5.58 per year or 11p per week to the Band D Tax. The cost to the Band A taxpayer will be £3.72 per year or 7p per week.

4.0 Capital Programme

- 4.1 The Council's capital programme budget is funded from a combination of government grants such as the Major Repairs Allowance for Decent Homes expenditure and SHIP grant for private sector housing renewal, use of capital receipts from the sale of land and property and the use of revenue contributions from the HRA and Council balances. The Council currently has significant capital receipts available from housing land sales and these are available to fund major regeneration and affordable housing initiatives. The realisation of other receipts is required to fund the full proposed capital programme and these are still in the latter stages of completion.
- 4.2 The Medium Term Financial Plan and the Transition Plan has allowed for a Capital Programme of £20m to be maintained in 2008/09, subject to resources being available. The larger elements of this were outlined in the Transition Plan and are shown in the table below, and a contingency sum of £2.5m has provisionally been identified to meet other Corporate Projects such as the funding of planned maintenance of public buildings in accordance with asset management plans, LIP funding and the replacement of obsolete ICT equipment. These schemes will be assessed and prioritised when funding becomes available and Cabinet approval will be sought at a future meeting subject to the availability of resources.
- 4.3 Grant funding from various sources may assist some Capital schemes and, where this is the case, the grant will be fully additional to the resources available from the Council.

PROPOSED CAPITAL TARGET SPENDING LIMITS

	£000
Housing Revenue Account	7,700
Transition Projects	
Regeneration Trust – Housing Market Renewal	6,000
Construction and Skills Centre	2,500
Redevelopment of Spennymoor Town Centre [Arts Resource Centre]	1,300
Other Corporate Projects	2,500
Total Programme	<u>20,000</u>

PROGRAMME FUNDED BY: -

	Housing	General	Total
	£000	Fund	£000
	£000	£000	£000
Major Repairs Allowance	5,540	-	5,540
Private Sector Renewal*	-	1,250	1,250
Revenue Contributions from HRA	1,700	-	1,700
Use of Revenue Reserves	-	300	300
Capital Receipts	460	950	1,410
Capital Receipts earmarked for regeneration	-	9,800	9,800
	<u>7,700</u>	<u>12,300</u>	<u>20,000</u>

*Not confirmed yet**

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 As the purpose of this report is to seek Overview and Scrutiny's comments on the Budget proposals for this, there are no financial implications to be considered at this stage.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 The Council's three Overview and Scrutiny Committees will be consulted as part of the overall Budget process.

7.0 OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 Links to Corporate Objectives/Values

The timetable has been established to ensure that all appropriate actions are undertaken during the process of determining the 2008/09 budget in that the Council is:

- *Consulting the appropriate representatives of service users, customers and partners;*
- *Being responsible with and accountable for public finances.*
- *Being open, accessible, equitable, fair and responsive to the public.*

7.2 Risk Management

If the budget timetable, which includes this opportunity for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to consider and review the budget framework is not met, the Council could suffer an adverse cash flow in not being able to collect Council Tax from Council Taxpayers from the beginning of the financial year on the 1st April 2008. This timetable has therefore been devised to ensure that the appropriate statutory deadline to determine the level of Council Tax can be achieved.

The Budget Framework 2009 has been prepared on a medium risk basis. Account has been taken of some of the significant capital receipts that are expected to materialise during 2008/9 that would lead to additional investment income. Account has also been taken of the loss of external funding streams where appropriate.

The capital investment provisions set out in this report have been made in the light of known resources and a realistic assessment of capital receipts. As the revenue impact of all programmes has been fully counted for, a low risk approach has been taken.

7.3 Health and Safety

No additional implications have been identified.

7.4 Equality and Diversity

No Equality and Diversity implications have been identified as the purpose of this report is to identify the timetable for the budget process.

7.5 Legal and Constitutional

The appropriate Legal and Constitutional implications have been taken into account in determining the Budget timetable

7.6 No other 'Material Considerations' have been identified.

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Background Papers: The Constitution – Part 4 Section C – Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules.

Budget Framework 2008/09 – report to Cabinet 10.01.2008

Appendices

Appendix 1 General Fund Revenue Budget Summary

Appendix 2 Explanatory Notes

Appendix 3 Environment Revenue Budgets 2008/09

Appendix 4 Planning & Development Revenue Budgets 2008/09

Appendix 5 Social Regeneration & Partnerships Revenue Budgets 2008/09

Appendix 6 Learning & Employment Revenue Budgets 2008/09

Examination by Statutory Officers:

	Yes	Not Applicable
1. The report has been examined by the Council's Head of the Paid Service or his representative.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The content has been examined by the Council's S.151 Officer or his representative.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The content has been examined by the Council's Monitoring Officer or his representative.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Management Team has approved the report.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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