

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

RESOURCES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday, 6th February, 2012

Present:- Councillors John Bull (Chair), Manda Rigby (Vice-Chair), Colin Barrett, Charles Gerrish, Dave Laming, Chris Watt and Nigel Roberts

Councillors Eleanor Jackson; Paul Fox and Patrick Anketell-Jones also attended for all or part of the meeting.

Also in attendance: Michaela Gay (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Andrew Pate (Strategic Director – Resources), Tim Richens (Divisional Director - Finance) and David Trethewey (Divisional Director - Policy & Partnerships)

45 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

46 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

47 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

There were none.

48 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Councillor Charles Gerrish declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 8 as a member of BANES Inclusive Sports Association. Councillor Gerrish also declared an interest in this item regarding the proposals on the residential care for adults with learning difficulties.

49 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

50 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE DEPUTATIONS, STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING

There were none.

51 MINUTES - 16TH JANUARY 2012

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record following the amendment set out below:

43 SERVICE ACTION PLANS (*last line*)

"Members noted the EIA which they used in their consideration of the report".

52 MEDIUM TERM SERVICE AND RESOURCE PLANNING 2012/13-2014/15, & BUDGET COUNCIL TAX 2012/13

Appendix 1

Councillor Bull questioned the phrase 'listening approach of the Council' (page 4). Councillor Bellotti - Cabinet Member for Community Resources explained that there was further information on page 13 but he acknowledged the point and said that he would get the phrase re-worded.

Councillor Jackson asked what had happened to the £235k dedicated to the homeless. Tim Richens - Divisional Director Finance, explained that this was part of the 'On-going Headroom Allocations'. (page 13).

Councillor Gerrish asked if spending on the Gypsy and Traveller site was being identified too soon in the budget. The officer explained that in theory, the some of the money could be made available as a one off but that the recurring cost had to be shown. Councillor Gerrish asked if there could be a breakdown of the £250k. Councillor Bellotti explained that the Cabinet instructions to officers was that there is a need for a Gypsy and Travellers site as soon as possible and the money is in the budget to do it.

Councillor Jackson asked what the £0.5m for Radstock Regeneration was for (page 23). Councillor Bellotti explained that it was a new scheme for a further boost to the area.

Councillor Gerrish asked about the change in the decision making process regarding Local Transport Improvement Schemes (page 25). He explained that in the previous process, there was a greater degree of openness in the pre-decision stage and that the new process takes away a level of engagement. The Cabinet Member explained that the new administration wanted as few single member decisions as possible. He accepted the point and stated that maybe the following year, a compromise could be reached.

Councillor Laming referred to the 20 MPH scheme (page 25) and asked what the £500k included. The Cabinet Member explained that this would fund the scheme, where required, for whole authority.

Councillor Watt entered the meeting at 6.10pm.

Councillor Laming asked about the £100k for River Safety (page 27). He explained that there had been ongoing efforts to find out who the relevant land belongs to so he was not sure how the Council would proceed with the safety measures. The

Cabinet Member explained that the RoSPA report was clear and that where necessary, the authority would take legal advice.

Councillor Jackson asked why the estimated reserves had gone into sharp decline (page 40). Andrew Pate - Strategic Director Resources, explained that some of the reserves had been used in 'invest to save' projects. There was a plan to recover the reserves.

Councillor Watt explained that when the three parishes were separated, Charlton Road was put into the Westfield area in the precept budget in error. The Strategic Director explained that the adjustment had been made and the Equalisation Grant was there to avoid any impacts in the first year.

Councillor Watt asked about 'Other Miscellaneous Budgets' (Appendix 1 Annex 1). The Divisional Director, Finance explained that this was a presentational issue and that there would be a presentation with more information on this at item 9 on the agenda. Councillor Watt asked that another description be used.

Comments on Annex 5

Children's Services

Councillor Bull asked about the absence of detailed financial plans for 2013/14 onwards in this area. The Panel noted the uncertainties associated with the fundamental review of the LEA (Local Education Authority) role in response to the creation of Academies and the new system of Local Government finance. The Cabinet Member explained that it was hoped that any new academies would use the services and expertise of the LEA. He also explained that he had asked that next year's budget be done on a zero based approach.

Adult Social Care and Housing, People and Communities - Saving Items

Councillor Bull stated that he had concerns that the Equalities Impact Assessment did not look at the global effect of the proposed savings on adults with learning difficulties. Councillor Jackson also made this point about the EIA.

The Panel had serious concerns about the proposed savings in the unit cost of registered residential care for adults with learning difficulties. The Panel noted that the robustness of the savings proposals would be reviewed.

The Cabinet member explained that there had been reservations within the Cabinet but the officers believe that these reductions can be made in the cost of the service. He explained that in this authority, the level of individual contributions was not as high as other authorities in the South West and also that the amount this authority paid to providers was higher. He explained that there would be close monitoring of the service.

Councillor Gerrish had some concerns about savings in 'Personal Budgets' as he felt this would remove choice.

Councillor Gerrish stated that while he realised that Somer Housing (page 9) was the largest provider of social housing, he was surprised that other providers are not mentioned regarding the Disabled Facilities Grants.

Heritage Services

The Panel had some reservations over the income trends in this area and asked if they were over optimistic. The Panel noted that officers would check the figures in the latest monitoring report and be sure that the budget reflected any downward trends.

Parking - Blue Badges (page 16)

Councillor Jackson spoke against the proposal to charge £10 for blue badges. The Cabinet Member explained that the cost of the badges was £17/18 and the cost was subsidised.

Highways - Drainage and Gully Cleansing (page 17)

Councillor Barrett had some concerns regarding cuts to this service (especially with regard to Weston) as he felt that the effects on road maintenance would be likely to offset any saving if not well managed and prioritised. Councillor Bull noted that the Planning, Transport and Environment PDS Panel had also raised concerns about this.

Waste Services - Reduce hours at Recycling Centres (page 18)

Councillor Gerrish stated his concern at the reduction in hours to this service and suggested that the centres opened later and closed later on Sundays.

End Mobile Library Service (page 20)

Councillor Gerrish asked officers to review the figures on this and obtain more clarity from the department as different figures had been referred to elsewhere. The clarity of the Equalities Impact Assessment on this service was noted. Councillor Bull noted the Economic and Community Development PDS Panel comments on this issue. The Cabinet member explained that the users fell into different groups some of which could be helped by the home book service. He explained that it was about getting the right service to the people who need it.

Reduce spend on leisure activity and local leisure events (page 18)

The Panel noted that more work was needed on the Equalities Impact Assessment in this area. Councillor Watt questioned the balance between activities to create tourism footfall and activities to increase local participation plus a concern about the reference in the service action plan regarding the expected impact of service cuts on people with low incomes. Councillor Watt suggested subsidising tickets for vulnerable groups.

Councillor Chris Watt asked about the lack of detailed scrutiny on the treasury management function. Councillor Bull explained that there was a presentation on this at the next item on the agenda. The Strategic Director further explained that the Corporate Audit Committee had a specific duty to scrutinise this area.

53 PRESENTATION ON CORPORATE BUDGET ITEMS

Tim Richens, Divisional Director - Finance gave a presentation on 'Analysis of Corporate Budgets 2011/12 to 2012/13'. *(A full copy of the presentation is held on the Council's minute book for the Panel in the Democratic Services office)*

Panel members raised the following points and asked the following questions:

Councillor Chris Watt stated that large figures can be lost in the assumptions made in the budget and he wanted more clarity and visibility, including further scrutiny of the corporate / treasury management function within the council and in particular assumptions made around internal rates of return. The Cabinet Member replied that the assumptions are prudent and that officers cannot predict interest rates, they can only project.

Councillor Gerrish stated that there has to be a degree of prudence as interest rates are not as historically stable as they have been over the last couple of years. He pointed out that the Council had chosen not to put money in Icelandic banks and sought reassurance of the continued use of robust assessments of risk. The Strategic Director commented that the Corporate Audit Committee get very involved in this.

Regarding savings on electricity, Councillor Watt explained the way electricity is supplied and charged and pointed to savings that could be made in the Council.

Councillor Watt asked about the 'Misc' column in the presentation and stated that there should be more clarity and visibility.

The meeting ended at 8.45 am

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services