

MINUTES OF ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Thursday, 25 January 2007

07.ECS.04 BUDGET SCRUTINY FOR 2007/2008

The Director of Finance submitted a report on the way forward for the budget scrutiny for 2007/08 that had been suggested by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2006.

The report set out the background to the recommendations made by the Panels during the 2006/07 budget consultation, resulting in some value being received from the process. This year was a significant year in terms of the Council introducing the new Community Strategy and any work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee must be undertaken in this context.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 4 December 2006 (Minute 06.0S.71 refers) agreed to focus its attention for the 2007/08 budget on the following:

- To receive an update on the high cost areas identified during the 2006/2007 scrutiny relating to Planning Services and Environmental Services.
- To review the 2006 cost profiles prepared by the Audit Commission as compared to those in 2005 for the Planning Services and Environmental Services.
- To review the likely impact of the efficiencies and savings on the Council's ability to deliver the promises in the Corporate Plan and the mitigation being put in place.
- A review of the low cost areas where a small increase in cost may bring a relatively bigger improvement.

The report indicated that the Council had recently been the subject to its annual Value for Money assessment undertaken by the Audit Commission as part of its Use of Resources review.

The Audit Commission had undertaken some benchmarking of costs compared with the Council's family group which exhibited the same attributes as ourselves in terms of demograph, population etc.

The Panel received in the report comparative costs with the previous years data to provide analysis for the scrutiny review.

The report also provided a summary of the impact of the budget savings/efficiency proposals for 2007/08 relating to Planning Services and Environmental Services. The report indicated that the cost profiles for 2006 had shown a very positive picture when compared with the 2005 figures with the Council's relative cost ranking improving in almost all areas. In those areas showing no improvement the budget proposals included action to reduce their costs. Balanced against the efficiencies and budget savings was the need to deliver the Council's Corporate Plan.

It was **AGREED** that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be recommended to submit the following comments to the Executive Cabinet as part of this year's budget consultation exercise.

1. That the Executive Cabinet be requested to examine the calculation of secondary charge (recharges) as in the case of Planning Services they have resulted in a distorted view of the Directorate's budget.
2. That the Executive Cabinet be asked if it is content with a decrease in design quality leading to a reduction in customer satisfaction as a result of the proposal to delete the post of Urban Designer in the Development and Regeneration Directorate.
3. That the Executive Cabinet be asked if the reduction in the cost of the Neighbourhood Wardens Team of £228,000 will have an impact on the service and provide a lower level of service delivery.
4. That the Executive Cabinet be asked if the savings made and the introduction of charges for all pest control services will have a benefit to rodent control.