

AT A MEETING  
- of the  
**SPECIAL REGENERATION, HOUSING,  
ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY SAFETY  
BUDGET CONFERENCING  
SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**  
held at The Council House, Walsall on  
**Friday 25 November 2005 at 6.00pm**

**PRESENT**

Councillor I. Shires	(Chairman)
Councillor Arif	(Vice-Chair)
Councillor Aslam	
Councillor Robinson	
Councillor Towe	
Councillor Yasin	

**OFFICERS**

Keith Stone  
Martin Yardley  
Vicky Crowshaw  
Paul Simpson  
Andy Ody  
Steve Pugh  
John Beavon  
Pat Warner

**APOLOGIES**

An apology for non attendance was submitted on behalf of Councillor Anson.

**SUBSTITUTIONS**

The chairman advised the panel of the following change to the membership of the panel for the duration of this meeting: -

- Delete: Councillor Harrison
- Substitute: Councillor Towe

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

## 2006/7 BUDGET UPDATE

The panel welcomed Vicky Crowshaw who outlined the budget process and the objective of the meeting. Members noted that this meeting's objective was to allow scrutiny the opportunity to recommend to cabinet the priorities for service investment and disinvestments for 2006/7 budgetary period.

She confirmed that all five scrutiny panels would be meeting in November with the aim of feeding their comments into cabinet at their meeting on 21 December 2005 following the receipt of the draft settlement which is expected to be received from the government around the 5 December 2005.

Following the November round of scrutiny meetings, scrutiny panels were again expected to meet in January to enable members to look at the draft corporate revenue budget and the draft capital programme. Comments from scrutiny panels at those meetings would be fed into cabinet at their meeting on the 18 January 2006 where the revised draft budget would be considered. This council's expected to receive its final settlement from the government towards the end January 2006 and the consultation with other stakeholders would be taking place between November 2005 and January 2006 combining in cabinet's recommendations to full council on 6 March 2006.

Vicky confirmed that there were challenges to the 2006/7 budget in that the Gershon efficiency savings demanded a 2½% savings from this council together with 3 year budgets and council tax settings; formula grant distribution changing's and delegated schools grant. Members were also advised that the capping rate although not yet known was hinted to be between 5 and 7.7%.

Vicky went on to explain the parameters of the planned budgetary process for Regeneration, Community Safety and Built Environment if members accepted the recommendations as set out in the documents submitted to this meeting. The net change to the budget for this area would be £2.313 million and the effect that would have on the council tax would be in the region of 2.64%.

Members thanked Vicky for her presentation and welcomed Martin Yardley who proceeded to summarise the regeneration priorities for this budgetary period. Keith Stone also summarised the neighbourhood services priorities. Paul Simpson advised the panel about the local area agreement and how it impacted on the budget for 2006/7.

Paul said that the local area agreement was a 3 year one between Central Government and the local area represented by the Local Strategic Partnership, the Local Authority and other key partners at local levels. He said it was an outcome based organisation which enables delivery of national outcomes in a way that reflects local priorities. He continued that the local area agreement priorities were grouped around 4 blocks of services; children and young peoples; safer, stronger communities; healthier communities and older people; and economic development and enterprise. External funds relating to each of these blocks he said could either

be pulled or lined which gave significant opportunity for the public sector agencies to work together and maximise total available resources.

He concluded that a reward grant was achievable through the local area agreement where it could be proven that a real difference would be made within the community for those services and the achievement of this known as the stretched targets would result in the grant being awarded. He said there was also a pump-priming grant of £1 million which could also be achieved.

The panel thanked officers for their presentations and Councillor Shires he was especially happy to receive the information on local area agreements.

He went on to say that if this authority is to achieve the kind of services which will strengthen community engagement and achieve the neighbourhood agenda cabinet will need to look at allocating additional funding to local neighbourhood partnerships to enhance the support currently being received by the partnerships.

Paul Simpson said that although no additional funds had been allocated for local neighbourhood partnerships they were seen as playing a vital role in local area agreements and that local area agreements would bring in a range of extensive funding other than the £8.700,000 already referred to. He said that the councils improvement would depend on the success of both the local neighbourhood partnerships and the local area agreements.

Councillor Shires enquired as to why housing issues had not been included within this budget submission. The panel were advised that housing will be a priority within the capital budget but that there were no revenue implications within this financial year.

Prior to the panel's consideration of the budgetary implications as set out in the document circulated the panel wished cabinet to be advised of the following: -

#### RESOLVED:

- That cabinet must adequately fund local neighbourhood partnerships in order to progress the neighbourhood agenda and strengthen community engagement.

The panel proceeded to scrutinise the investment bids and the budget reduction deficiencies and comment on the priority for each bid.

#### Strategic choice/ investment bid

##### Neighbourhood services

- The panel noted that the funds for the strategic choice i nvestment bids relating to Neighbourhood Services had already been allocated within the budget.

Regeneration		Priority	Comments
1	Town Centre Management	High	The panel wished to see the heading for this investment bid referring to Town Centres thereby incorporating reference to district centres.
2	Walsall Markets	Medium	
3	Memorial Safety	Low	
4	Streetly Cemetery	High	
5	Enhance litter hit squad – one squad	High	
6	Enhance litter hit squad – additional one squad	High	
7	Enhance litter hit squad – additional one squad	High	
8	Safety fence repairs	High	
9	Gritting of footways	Medium	
10	Land charge searches	Low	
11	Traffic signal maintenance	High	
12	Highways maintenance procurement strategy	High	
13	Highways assets management planning	High	
14	Household waste recycling centres	High	
15	Borough wide garden waste collection	High	
16	Borough wide garden waste collection – further expansion	High	
17	Waste reduction recycling campaign plan	High	
18	Mainstream community safety	High	Members commented that this service had potential for community partners to become more involved in the provision of this service.

Members noted that as a result of the decisions made in respect of the investment bids at this meeting the possible impact this service will have on the council tax will be a possible increase of 1.7%.

#### Budget reductions/efficiencies

Regeneration		Priority	Comments
1	To reduce support for WBSP – context of new NRF funding until March 2008.	High	
2	Black Country Consortium	High	

## Neighbourhood Services

<b>Regeneration</b>		<b>Priority</b>	<b>Comments</b>
3	Increase in fees and charges – bereavement services	High	
4	Additional income planning application fees	High	
5	Reduction in revenue funded highways maintenance	High	This priority been given on the condition that funding is provided for this service from capital budget.
6	External sponsorship of traffic islands	High	
7	Additional income for textiles recycling	High	
8	Increase in fleet charges to external customers	High	
9	Coroner? – impact of partnership working	High	
10	Testing fees/sampling – food sampling and non food sampling	Low	
11	Works in default	Low	
12	Introduction of LNP based team working systems for grounds maintenance	Medium	
13	Car parks water rates	High	
14	General service efficiencies – grounds maintenance and street cleansing	High	
15	Increase in charges for trade waste collection	High	
16	Re-tendering of winter maintenance service	Low	
17	Reduction in CCTV operative budget	High	
18	Increase fee and charges – licensing/pest patrol	High	
19	Car park maintenance	Low	
20	Skips income	High	

Members noted that the total investments suggested at this meeting amounted to £1.5 million which would incur a 1.7% increase in council tax if approved and the proposed savings following the decisions made at this meeting is £1.39 million with a possible 1.5% savings on the council tax.

Vicky confirmed that in balancing the 2 budget processes the net council tax savings in respect of the proposals put forward by the scrutiny panel would amount to 0.2% added to the council tax.

Members RESOLVED:

That the proposals put forward at this meeting be submitted to cabinet as this scrutiny panel's contribution to the budget process.

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 8.00 p.m.