

# **BRIEFING NOTE**

**TO: CORPORATE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**  
**DATE: 13 December 2007**

## **Draft Walsall Council Budget Options 2008/09**

### **Purpose**

To consider the budget options for Walsall Council's budget for 2008/09 in light of the Government indication of the proposed budget settlement.

### **Background**

At its meeting on 28 November 2007 the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel (SPP) received details of the budget options for Walsall Council for 2008/09. The Panel also received the recommendations of the remaining four Walsall Council SPP's.

During consideration of the budget options the Panel felt it prudent to revisit the options in light of an indication from Government on what the likely financial settlement for Walsall Council in 2008/09 would be. This would enable the Panel to make more appropriate recommendations.

### **Government Settlement**

The Government settlement was received on 6 December 2007 and further details will be presented to the Panel at the meeting.

### **Risk Assessment**

Details on the requested risk assessment on the likely impact of efficiencies in administration support to Children and Young People's services and Social Care and Inclusion from business support will be presented to the Panel at the meeting.

### **Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel**

At its meeting on 28 November 2007 the Corporate SPP recommended that the Neighbourhoods SPP reconsider their recommendation regarding the introduction of on street car parking.

The Neighbourhoods SPP considered the issue as an urgent item at its meeting on 6 December 2007. Following consideration of the Corporate SPP request the Neighbourhoods SPP resolved to stand by its original recommendation which was to support the budget option to receive fees from the introduction of on street car parking charges.

### **Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel**

The Regeneration SPP is meeting to reconsider the Regeneration Directorate budget options with additional information.

This meeting is taking place at 6.00pm on 13 December 2007. The recommendations of the Regeneration SPP at this meeting will be reported to Cabinet on 19 December 2007.

### **Recommendations**

**That:**

**a) the budget options for Walsall Council in 2008/09 be reconsidered in light of the proposed Government settlement;**

**and;**

**b) any recommendations Members wish to make be considered by Cabinet when it approves its draft budget.**

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## **BRIEFING NOTE**

**To: Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel**  
**Date: 7 December, 2007**

**Re: request for further information on investment bid for coroner's costs - Budget Preparation 2008/09**

### **Purpose**

This note is in response to a request for additional information following a question raised at the Corporate SPP meeting on 28 November 2007. The panel asked for detail on the £20,000 investment bid for coroner's services and questioned whether Walsall could establish its own coroner service at a cheaper cost.

### **Officer response:**

The budget was reduced in 2007/8 as part of savings proposals offered by Public Protection linked to a renegotiation of the purchasing arrangements for carrying out post mortems at the request of the Coroner at the Manor Hospital Mortuary. In fact the negotiations delivered approx 19% savings on the previous year's costs, but this did not deliver the full savings target.

The Coroner's budget is demand led based on the number of suspicious deaths requiring investigation, so expenditure is outside the direct control of the local authority. Forensic pathology costs and medical fees are outside the service level agreement for mortuary running costs with the hospital, and new higher national charges have been levied. Costs of witness and other expenses linked to inquests are also outside the council's direct control. The Coroner is requesting improvements to his accommodation in West Bromwich, and this growth bid partially reflects the likely additional contribution the council will need to make for this and also the previous years unachievable savings on post mortem costs.

The shared Coroner costs are apportioned between Sandwell, Dudley and Walsall to an agreed service level agreement, based on population. Instead of the 3 authorities paying for a part-time Coroner on different individual arrangements, the new arrangement allocates costs of the shared whole time Coroner. This covers the Coroner's salary, accommodation costs, allowable expenses etc. Each local authority administers their own post mortem arrangements and pays their own associated medical costs.

Walsall, along the other black country L.A.'s each had it's own Coroner until around 3 years ago when the decision was taken to create a shared Coroner including Dudley and Sandwell, thus realising savings through splitting the costs of coroner's office and administration.

Central Government is currently looking to phase out part-time Coroners in favour of full time posts covering geographical areas containing a population of approximately 1 million people. Walsall's current arrangements, in terms of population size and the Coroner being full time, are in harmony with these proposals.

Please let me know if you require any further information.

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# BRIEFING NOTE

**TO:** Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel  
**DATE:** 13 December 2007

**RE: Risk associated with proposed Business Support efficiencies**

## **Purpose**

This briefing note has been produced in response to a request by Corporate Services Scrutiny panel to assess risks associated with the proposed efficiencies within administrative support provided to Social Care & Inclusion, and Children and Young Peoples Directorates.

## **Efficiency Proposals**

As part of the budget discussions a proposal has been made to reduce the current administrative staff within Social Care & Inclusion, and Children and Young Peoples Directorates, by 4 posts within each Directorate, representing roughly a 5% reduction in posts.

## **Delivery of Efficiencies**

In order to deliver general efficiencies across all Business Support functions and within these two Directorates in particular, there needs to be a move to a different model for the delivery of support.

The focus will need to be on outcomes and key priorities, and within this framework current processes and procedures will have to be challenged to identify improvements and to stop doing those things that add little or no value to the organisation or its customers.

A commitment has been made to increase the levels of pooled or shared resources, consolidate common functions and exploit opportunities provided by the development of technology and IT solutions. The Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) has identified Social Care & Inclusion (SC&I) and Children and Young People (CYP) as key priorities for this activity, due to the sensitivities around service provision in these services, but also because these Directorates have the highest numbers of support staff.

A number of operational reorganisations, and technology developments i.e. PARIS can have an impact on the ability to deliver increased efficiency. There have been delays to date in these projects which have had a negative impact on the ability to move forward with remodelling of support services.

In order for these efficiencies to be developed in a co-ordinated manner, two way consultation and discussion with the services will be crucial. This will ensure the mitigation of risks associated with making unilateral reductions and meetings have been scheduled to start this process.

Specific posts have not yet been identified to achieve these efficiencies from within these services as these current actions are being driven by the budget process. Reductions would be sought as part of the transformation but would be arrived at differently. The post

reductions are indicative of what business support believes can be achieved by improving the way we work.

### **Identified Risks**

As specific posts have not been identified, it is difficult to outline specific individual risks.

However, there are a number of general risks to the frontline service and the process identified, that could happen if there was an uncoordinated approach to the delivery of efficiencies:

1. A delay in the remodelling programme, either through lack of capacity to deliver change or lack of engagement will create pressure to make short term decisions.
2. Decisions not taking into account key service pressures, and therefore potentially undermining the ability of the services to discharge statutory obligations, leaving the Council potentially vulnerable legally and having a direct impact on the lives of service users.
3. Negative impact on key Performance Indicator's, therefore assessment scores.

### **Actions to address the risks**

In order to ensure that efficiencies can be achieved, whilst maintaining an appropriate level of support, the following actions are required to mitigate negative service impact.

1. SLT has agreed that priority be given to remodelling and efficiency activity within SC&I and CYP services, to ensure that capacity is available.
2. Discussions are planned in January with Executive and Assistant Directors to agree the priority areas of service, minimum acceptable levels of service and 'tipping points' beyond which further reductions cannot be achieved.
3. Engagement of operational managers within the services, through the mandate agreed at SLT is critical to maintain momentum, and ensure that decisions are pragmatic and achievable.
4. If as part of the review process, it is agreed that sufficient efficiencies cannot be achieved without jeopardising critical service delivery, a decision will need to be taken to identify alternative efficiencies in other services where impact will be less.

### **Recommendations**

Note the contents of the briefing note, specifically in terms of the actions required to manage the risks associated with the achievement of efficiencies, to ensure that service impact can be mitigated.

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