

CORPORATE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Monday 28 November 2007 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present Councillor M. Longhi (Chair)
Councillor M. Bird
Councillor J. Cook
Councillor J. Rochelle
Councillor H. Sarohi
Councillor C. Towe
Councillor D. Turner

Other Members present Councillor E. Hughes
Councillor D. Pitt

Officers present James Walsh – Assistant Director – Finance
Alison Jarrett – Head of Service Finance
Dan Mortiboys – Finance Service Manager
Craig Goodall – Scrutiny Officer

37/07 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of J. Phillips.

38/07 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of this meeting.

39/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

40/07 RECEIVE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANELS

The Panel received the recommendations from each Scrutiny and Performance Panel (SPP) at Walsall Council who have each considered the budget options for services within their remits.

A briefing note containing all the recommendations of the Scrutiny and Performance Panels was tabled at the meeting.

Councillor D. Pitt, Chairman of the Regeneration SPP, presented his Panels recommendations as contained in the circulated briefing note. In response to questions Councillor Pitt explained that the Regeneration SPP had arranged an additional meeting to consider the budget options in more detail so that meaningful recommendations to Cabinet could be made.

Members stated that they thought in future scrutiny should consider the budget options after the provisional financial settlement for Government had been received.

Councillor C. Towe, Chairman of the Neighbourhoods SPP, presented his Panels recommendations as contained in the circulated briefing note. He explained that the Panel had requested additional information regarding the proposed investment to Blakenall Library. The Panel were disappointed to discover that Blakenall Village Centre required financial assistance and felt that it should be run as a business by being self sufficient and not relying on Council subsidies.

The Corporate SPP questioned the £20,000 investment for coronors services and requested that an investigation take place to establish whether Walsall could establish its own coronor at a cheaper cost.

Members questioned if the proposed investment to verge parking could be made into an income stream with the introduction of decriminalised parking. The Chairman recalled that an initial investment was required in the area before any income could be recouped.

Alison Jarrett explained that the expenditure under the 'public realm maintainance' was for purchasing new specialist equipment to clean areas such as those outside the civic centre.

The Chairman presented the recommendation of the Corporate SPP as contained in the circulated briefing note.

Councillor E. Hughes, Chairman of the Children and Young Peoples SPP presented the recommendation of his Panel as contained in the circulated briefing note.

In response to a question James Walsh clarified that a £150,000 investment for additional child concern workers was required to deliver savings in later years.

Craig Goodall presented the recommendation from the Health, Social Care and Inclusion SPP as contained in the circulated briefing note. Attention was also drawn to an extract from the draft minutes of the Health, Social Care and Inclusion SPP that was attached at Appendix 1 to the circulated briefing note.

Members noted that there was a general feeling that the Centre for Independent living was not fulfilling its intended role.

Members expressed disappointment in the recommendations of the Health, Social Care and Inclusion SPP and requested that the Chairman be invited to call an extra meeting so that the Panel could reconsider the budget options with the benefit of the provisional financial settlement from Government.

As at least two SPP's were meeting after the issuing of the Cabinet agenda for 19 December 2007, where the draft Walsall Council budget was going to be set, the Panel felt that it would be beneficial if Cabinet could delay consideration of the draft budget to a later date to enable SPP recommendations to be fully considered.

41/07 WALSALL COUNCIL BUDGET OPTIONS 2008/09

The Panel received a financial overview of the budget options for Walsall Council for 2008/09. A summary sheet reflecting the financial implications of recommendations of all SPP's was circulated.

The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- Page 1, Item 11, 'Increase in building costs of Blakenall Library' from the circulated summary sheet be moved into the 'rejected' column. This issue would be reconsidered once the requested additional information had been made available to the Neighbourhoods SPP.
- Page 2, Item 26 'Trade Union Posts' and Item 27 'Job Evaluation Manager' be marked so that it is understood that the Panel support the posts but wish them to be funded from reserves rather than the revenue budget.
- Page 11, Item 5 'Introduction of on street car parking charges in town centre' be rejected by the Corporate SPP. Questions were asked on when the policy to introduce this had been passed?

Members strongly disagreed with the introduction of on street car parking charges and requested that the Neighbourhoods SPP reconsider their recommendations on the budget options.

- Page 3, Item 9 'Anticipated growth in tipping'. In response to questions it was clarified that an increase in commercial fly tipping was anticipated. It was thought the budget was split between cleansing areas that had experienced tipping and securing prosecutions against those caught tipping. No increase in household tipping was expected. Members requested a breakdown on how the proposed breakdown was proposed to be spent.
- Members considered whether or not Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (LNP's) should be supported once Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) ended on 31 March 2008. It was discussed whether something similar could be operated for less funding. It was noted that the public engagement LNP's created was desirable to retain.

Alison Jarrett clarified that although NRF was coming to an end an indication had been received that it would be replaced with the new working neighbourhoods grant but no details of this were available at the time.

Resolved

That:

- a) in light of the late receipt of the financial settlement from central Government the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel ask that Cabinet consider the draft Walsall Council budget for 2008/09 later than 19 December 2007 to allow for the comments from all Scrutiny and Performance Panels to be fully considered;**
- b) in light of the vital role that scrutiny has in influencing the policy and priorities of Cabinet the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel request that the Chairman of the Health, Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel convene a meeting to enable Members of the Panel to review the opinions expressed on the budget options for the Health, Social Care and**

Inclusion Directorate in light of the provisional financial settlement from central Government;

- c) the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel strongly encourage Cabinet not to introduce on street car parking charges in the town centre;**
- d) the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel reconsider the proposed budget option concerning the proposed introduction of on street car parking charges in the town centre;**
- e) the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel be informed of the proposed introduction of on street car parking charges in the town centre so its likely impact can be taken in account when the Panel consider regeneration issues in and around the town centre;**
- f) a breakdown of the £45,000 investment for the anticipated growth in tipping be provided;**
- g) the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel be informed on the variety of waste that is tipped and whether there has been an increase in the tipping of household waste in recent years;**
- h) the cost of appointing a dedicated coroner for the Walsall area be investigated; and;**
- i) the scrutiny working group review the future role of scrutiny in the budget setting process and consider holding scrutiny and performance panel meetings to consider the budget options after the provisional financial settlement from central Government has been received.**

The meeting terminated at 7.44 p.m.

Chair:

Date: