

SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

WEDNESDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2011 AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE, WALSHALL

Panel Members Present Councillor M. Longhi (Chair)
Councillor R. Burley
Councillor M. Flower
Councillor B. Sanders
Councillor J. Rochelle
Councillor I. Shires
Councillor D. Turner

Portfolio Holders Present Councillor M. Bird – Leader
Councillor C. Towe – Finance and Personnel

Officers Present Rory Borealis – Executive Director (Resources)
Tracey Evans - Lead Accountant
Neil Picken – Senior Constitutional Services Officer

44/10 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Jeavons.

45/10 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions.

46/10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

47/10 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 9 & 10 December 2010, copies having previously circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

48/10 REVISED DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET AND DRAFT CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2011/12 FOR CONSULTATION

The Panel considered Cabinets revised draft revenue budget and draft capital programme proposals for 2011/12.

The Executive Director (Resources) explained that there had been no further changes to the revenue budget which had been considered by the Panel on 10 December, 2010. The capital budget had not been

previously bought to the Panel and Members were directed to Appendix 1a of the report which set out the draft capital programme in detail. Members considered the council wide investment in information & communications technology (ICT) which the Executive Director explained was instrumental in reducing overheads and modernising the services provided by the Council to make them more efficient and effective.

Members considered the information and sought clarity on the £150k capital investment required in the Benefits Service to increase productivity by home working. It was reported that savings of up to £120k a year would be targeted if the bid was approved. A pilot project would be undertaken to assess productivity both at work and at home and, subject to this being successful, home working could be extended. The Leader highlighted that home working would be important given the context of the 'Smarter Workplace' project which sought to reduce the number of office locations from 26 to 6.

Members requested that sickness figures during the pilot scheme be compiled and reported back to the Panel.

With reference to ICT the importance of ensuring that it was compatible with other partners was stressed. Members were assured that all efforts would be made to ensure that the right information would be available and accessible. The matter of shared intelligence was under active consideration by Walsall Partnership Board.

Further discussion took place regarding the procurement of consumables with concern expressed that the Council was not achieving the best prices. It was stated that this was an area which was being investigated and would be improved.

With regard to the budget process it was noted that there was some alignment between the online budget simulator and the proposed budget. That said, Members stated that it was important to increase the usage of the budget simulator in future years by raising awareness at an earlier stage of the budget process. This could include sending out information with Council Tax bills.

Having considered the report in detail members:-

RESOLVED

- 1) That the revised draft revenue budget and draft capital programme for 2011/12 be noted;**
- 2) That sickness figures during the home working pilot scheme be compiled and reported back to the Panel.**

49/10 **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANELS**

The Panel considered the report, tabled at the meeting, which set out the recommendations of the following Scrutiny and Performance Panels:-

- Children and Young People
- Community Services
- Environment
- Social Care and Inclusion (including contributions made by Members of the Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel).
- Regeneration

Resolved

That the recommendations of the following Scrutiny and Performance Panels be noted;-

- **Children and Young People**
- **Community Services**
- **Environment**
- **Social Care and Inclusion (including contributions made by Members of the Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel).**
Regeneration

50/10 **REVISED DRAFT CORPORATE BUDGET AND DRAFT FORMULA GRANT SETTLEMENT**

The Panel considered the revised draft corporate budget and draft formula grant settlement as reported to Cabinet held on 12 January, 2011.

The Executive Director (Resources) brought attention to the reductions in grant that had been brought to light during the publication of the final settlement in December, 2010. The report presented the second draft revenue and capital budget proposals for 2011/12, together with an update on funding following receipt of the draft formula grant settlement on 13 December, 2010.

Discussion ensued on the change in the grant settlements as many were no longer restrained by being ring-fenced. This gave the Authority greater flexibility on how the grants were spent although, overall, the grant settlement had reduced by 6.224m.

Concern was expressed that the removal of ring fencing would adversely affect the Playbuilder programme with everything after phase 1 being frozen. In response to this assurance was given that should there be slippage in the Capital Programme this matter would be revisited and given priority.

Members sought assurances that the projected potential overspend position for 2010 - 11 which stood at £300k would not worsen and as such the level of reserves would be sufficient to ensure an opening working balance of at least the minimum required. In response it was reported that Managers were working hard to ensure that the overspend position would not worsen.

In closing, Members remarked on the openness and transparency of the budget process and expressed a view that it should continue to develop in future years with active cross party engagement.

Resolved

That the draft corporate budget and draft formula grant settlement proposals, as presented to Cabinet on 12 January, 2011, be noted.

51/10 WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

Resolved:-

- 1) That the following items be considered at the meeting to be held on 3rd March, 2011:-**
 - **Working Smarter**
 - **Corporate Plan**
 - **Web Improvement Plan**
- 2) That Office Accommodation be added to the work programme.**

52/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as 3 March, 2011.

The meeting closed at 6.35 p.m.

Signed:

Date: