

Extracts from draft Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Panel meetings concerning Scrutiny of the 2011-2012 Budget proposals

Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Panel, 10 January 2011

The Director of Adult Social Care and Health presented a report on the key themes and priorities for the Adult Social Care and Health Department as outlined in the Council's Draft Budget Proposals for 2011/12. The key themes included draft budget pressures, draft budget savings, draft budget net position, capital spend, staffing implications, and fees, charges and other income. The Panel was advised that there was a need to identify further savings in excess of £1m in addition to those included in the budget proposals due to the lateness, complexity and scale of reduction of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

Draft budget pressures included purchased care for Adult Social Care for young people reaching adulthood, increasing numbers of older people and those with dementia, increasing numbers of people with long term conditions, and support for carers. Draft budget pressures consisted of £809,000 altogether.

Draft budget savings included improved commissioning in relation to residential and supported living costs, drugs and alcohol, the meals at home service and the resettlement service. The subsidy in relation to the meals at home service had been removed. The residential home at 8 Portman Close had been de-registered resulting in a reduction in support costs. A joint rehabilitation service was now being provided on behalf of the Primary Care Trust (PCT). There had been a 6% saving last year in relation to the consolidated rate for domiciliary care, and greater contributions regarding continuing health care.

Mobile working, and therefore spending less time in the office, had enabled staff in Adult Social Care to undertake visits more frequently. A vacant post had been deleted in relation to day opportunities. Some buildings would possibly be affected by the maintenance programme. The total draft budget savings were estimated at £1,382,000, leaving the net position at £573,000 once the budget pressures totalling £809,000 had been accounted for.

There were no major capital developments planned from the Corporate Capital Programme at present. The Personal Adult Social Services Capital Grant of £183,000, designed to support the three key areas of personalisation, reform and efficiency, was unallocated at present. A Section 88 transfer had been undertaken in relation to the Learning Disability Grant of £7,764,000. The net position had been increased by income streams.

The PCT had contributed funding of £175,000 for re-ablement enhancing and end of life care. Next year the NHS funding for social care would be £961,000. Work was being undertaken with the PCT to agree how best to use this funding to improve support and services. There would be increasing opportunities for joint working with the health sector and other organisations such as bordering local councils. There had been no reduction in Adult Social Care services as a consequence of the budget savings which resulted from work over the past two years to identify efficiencies and adopt improved working practices.

Arising from Members' questions and comments the following points were noted:

- The current year budget saving relating to additional support for carers had not resulted in any service reduction and had been achieved through use of

the Council's Ladybank service and other providers reducing the need to purchase respite care services from external providers. An increase in the range of support for carers created a budget pressure of £100,000 in 2011/12.

- Focus had been given to improving purchasing amongst other cost saving exercises.
- A budget pressure of £709,000 had arisen primarily from children with disabilities transferring from Children's Services to Adult Social Care when they reached 18 years of age and increasing numbers of older people and people with long term conditions requiring support living longer.
- The reduction in Government grant formed part of the £809,000 draft budget pressures.
- There would be a Section 75 agreement in relation to the transfer over of services to a GP Consortium when the PCT's were disbanded in order to maintain established links with the health sector.
- A Council wide contingency fund formed from underspends last year had met the cost of redundancies associated with service closures during this year.
- There had been no further care worker redundancies identified as part of the 2011/12 budget.

Panel Members asked for their thanks and appreciation to be passed to staff in the Adult Social Care and Health Department for all their hard work.

Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel, 11 January 2011

The Panel received extracts from the proposed 2011/12 General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Programme reports relating to Environment, Culture and Communities which were agreed for consultation by the Executive on 14 December 2010. The covering report advised that further savings of over £1m remained to be found in addition to those identified in the 2011/12 budget proposals subject to consultation, owing to the lateness, complexity and scale of grant reduction of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

The Director of Environment, Culture and Communities introduced the budget proposals which included detailed information on budget pressures and savings, proposed fees and charges, the Capital Programme and proposed Capital Schemes. The Director drew the Panel's attention to the proposed Commitment Budget for 2011/12 to 2014/15.

Arising from Members' questions and comments the following points were noted:

- No areas had been removed from the Commitment Budget for Environment, Culture and Communities, however the Department's commitments had been reviewed in detail and adjusted where necessary. It was agreed that the Director would provide further details of areas adjusted.
- The Borough Treasurer would provide Members with an update on the recovery of the Council's investments in Icelandic banks.
- The rate of car parking charges was set to optimise income from the Council's car parks whilst ensuring no reduction in footfall for the Town Centre. Current charges were set in accordance with the market rate.
- It was expected that Downshire Golf Complex, Car Park Income and Easthampstead Park Conference Centre would experience a decline in

income, however Downshire Golf Complex and Car park Income would continue to generate a surplus in 2011/12. Easthampstead Park Conference Centre would realise a loss for the first time primarily due to reduced business use.

- Alternative uses for Downshire Golf Complex had been considered in the past but had not been viable. Selling the Complex had been considered in the current fiscal year, however the Department had been advised that it was not the right time to release the asset to the market. The Downshire Golf Complex currently made an operational surplus for the Council.
- Easthampstead Park Conference Centre had previously been run by a private contractor, however this had not been profitable and Bracknell Forest Council had taken over management of the Centre. The Conference Centre was currently held jointly by the 6 unitary authorities in Berkshire on a 24 year contract, of which 6 years remained, after which the Centre would fall to this Council when the possibility of private sector management would be investigated.
- There would be a further reduction of £55,000 in the grant to the Thames Valley Safer Roads Partnership. The Partnership had been reorganised and efficiencies made which meant the same service would be received by Bracknell Forest without a reduction in road safety. The Partnership would be retaining speed cameras as they were considered to be a valuable safety feature.
- A £30,000 cost for dog control was due to an increase in the number of stray dogs, which the Council was legally obliged to rescue and home, and was not related to the post of Dog Warden which had been deleted as part of last year's budget savings.
- Opportunities to make reductions to the Council's Arts Development function had been pursued as this was not considered to be an essential service in the current economic climate. The Council would be working closely with partners such as South Hill Park to deliver the arts function in Bracknell Forest.
- Additional income received by Forest Care was as a result of the service taking on new corporate clients such as neighbouring local authorities and an increase in client numbers.
- The Commitment Budget contribution to the Sandhurst Freedom March in 2012 had been agreed by the Executive previously.
- The fees for Development Control reflected current market rates and would be revised next year to meet costs when local fee setting would commence. It was intended that local fee setting would take account of retrospective planning applications.

The Panel noted the draft budget proposals for 2011/12 and agreed that comments made in relation to the Environment, Culture and Communities Department Budget would be passed on to the Executive.

Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel, 12 January 2011

The Director of Children, Young People and Learning presented a report on the key themes and priorities for the Children, Young People and Learning Department as outlined in the Council's Draft Budget Proposals for 2011/12. The key themes included draft budget pressures, draft budget savings, draft budget net position, capital spend, staffing implications, and fees, charges and other income.

The Panel was informed that the draft budget proposals had been developed before the Council had received notification of its final financial settlement from Central Government. This settlement had now been received and work was taking place to ensure that proposals were in line with the settlement.

One of the most significant budgetary developments for the Department was the amalgamation of a number of grants into a single Early Intervention Grant and the removal of ringfencing. A move that gave greater flexibility in the way that funding could be spent.

The Government had placed a significant emphasis on the importance of early intervention and prevention work and these areas featured strongly in the draft proposals.

Arsing from Members' questions and comments the following points were noted:

- Figures in the 2011/12 Commitment Budget for Senior Management Restructure related to the restructure of the team following the departure of senior officers during 2009/10.
- Savings proposed in the Education Welfare Service would focus on the organisation surrounding the front line staff. The Council's statutory education welfare role would be maintained.
- Changes to the contract for advocacy and independent visiting would enable the provision of a spot service from a range of experienced providers which would be more appropriate to the Council's requirements than the previous service.
- The reduction of 0.6FTE staff at the Larchwood Short Break Care Centre would be through the loss of ancillary staff and not those staff working directly with the children using the service.
- The proposed saving in the cost of care and support for looked after children were a result of children naturally moving through the care system.
- The loss of 1.0FTE post in the Student Finance Section had been a planned redundancy following the centralisation of the student loans application service.
- A long term strategy was being developed for the delivery of speech and language therapy services. More details would be circulated to members.
- There had been no business case to continue funding the Family Tree Nursery and following consultation with families and staff it had been recommended that the Council close the Nursery on 31 March 2011. The associated report would be circulated to members.

The Panel stressed that they understood the need to make cut backs but expressed a wish that consideration be given to reinstating any services that had been reduced as soon as possible.

The Panel thanked the Director for her report and noted the draft budget proposals.