

MINUTE EXTRACTS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANELS CONCERNING THE 2016/17 BUDGET CONSULTATION

Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 11 January 2016

The Panel considered key themes and priorities for Children, Young People and Learning as outlined in the Council's draft budget proposals for 2016/17.

The Executive agreed the Council's draft budget proposals for 2016/17 at its meeting on 15 December 2015 as the basis for consultation with the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, Overview and Scrutiny Panels and other interested parties. The consultation period would expire on 31 January 2016, after which the Executive would consider the representations made at its meeting on 9 February 2016, before recommending the budget to Council.

Attached to the report were relevant extracts from the 2016/17 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme. The extracts were comprised of Revenue Budget Report, Commitment Budget, Draft Revenue Budget Pressures, Draft Revenue Budget Savings Proposals, Proposed Fees and Charges, Capital Programme Report and Summary and Proposed Capital Schemes.

The Panel was advised that notification of the Government grant had been received subsequent to the draft budget proposals being agreed as the basis for consultation and as the settlement was lower than expected it would be necessary for further savings to be identified.

Members focused their attention on the draft revenue budget pressures and savings. Attention was drawn to savings arising from additional income streams, reduced placement costs for Looked After Children and efficiencies resulting from revised delivery of services and support totalling £714,000. Budget pressures, which related to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), Post 16 Education Transport and Special Educational Needs (SEN), amounted to £246,000.

In response to related questions and discussion the following points were made:

- There had been an underspend in the Emergency Duty Team budget for several years and the proposed saving did not constitute a service reduction.
- The proposed reduction to Youth Justice support to parenting services would be partially compensated by work in other areas such as the Early Help Offer and Children's Centres and by signposting to other forms of support.
- As there had been low take up of some aspects of the Information, Advice and Guidance to young people service, the related contract had been reduced to achieve a saving and some services brought in-house to improve service provision and value for money.
- Efficiencies and cost reductions in the commissioning of the Joint Legal Team that provided a Berkshire wide service hosted by Reading Borough Council had been sought.
- As part of the on-going process to improve efficiency, a review of the youth offer had resulted in a saving of £58,000. The service would continue to provide targeted work and other measures to support emotional health and wellbeing included bids to NHS England and the Clinical Commissioning Group's Innovations Fund, focused work in

schools stemming from the Autism Strategy and training of professionals and volunteers through the Parents' Project.

- The streamlining of the management structure of the Children's Centres would increase consistency and efficiency.
- There was a budget pressure associated with the MASH which facilitated improved and more rapid decision making and information sharing consistently across Berkshire.
- The mandatory conversion of SEN Statements into Education Health Care Plans was a significant task requiring additional staff and posed a budget pressure.
- The Capital Programme included Phase 1 of the expansion of The Brakenhale School which included qualification for a grant associated with the condition survey.

Environment, Culture and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 12 January 2016

Although there was a need for further savings to be identified following notification of the Government grant settlement, the Panel was invited to scrutinise the firm budget proposals before it and the Director of Environment, Culture and Communities presented a report on the key themes and priorities for Environment, Culture and Communities as outlined in the draft budget proposals for 2016/17. The initial preparations for the budget had focussed on the Council's Commitment Budget for 2016/17 – 2020/21, bringing together existing expenditure plans, taking account of approved commitments and the ongoing effects of service developments and efficiencies that were agreed when the 2015/16 budget was set.

A number of changes were proposed to the Commitment Budget since it was last considered by the Executive, amounting in total to an increase for the Council of £1.032m. Of particular interest to the Panel were a departmental saving resulting from the Street Lighting Invest to Save Scheme (-£0.175m) and updated Waste Disposal projections based on the latest tonnages for recycling (£0.179m). The Panel also noted the draft revenue budget pressures for the Department totalling £263,000 for 2016/17, although these were more than outweighed by savings proposals amounting to £1,161,000.

Arising from questions and discussion, the Panel noted the following in relation to the budget pressures and savings proposals:

- In response to the reduction in income at Bracknell Leisure Centre (due to competition from small scale local gyms), plans were in hand to enhance the offer included within the Platinum Card package through discounts on catering and other facilities and working with staff to improve the all round customer experience for users. Officers were recommended to publicise the new package as widely as possible, and particular mention was made of obtaining copy in 'Town & Country' and other local newssheets.
- An outline of the duties of the posts of Strategic Planner (New Communities) and Development Engineer was given, together with reasons for continued funding for them.
- The dispute in relation to the waste contract had been settled and the additional recycle income was now assured.
- The additional income from increasing charges for brown bin emptying relied in part on continuing to sign up new customers for the service.
- The increases in Cemetery and Crematorium fees and charges were felt to be reasonable and had been set taking into account the fees charged by neighbouring

authorities and the quality of the service offered in Bracknell Forest which was valued and appreciated by users.

- The e+card savings arose from lower running costs rather than any reduction in the discounts offered.

Turning to the Capital Programme, the Panel noted that total capital spending proposed for Environment, Culture and Communities in 2016/17 amounted to £20.185m (of which £4.733m was external funding). The most significant project was the Coral Reef Transformation at an estimated £8.358m in 2016/17. The tender process for the project had been reset with prices from contractors now due in by 8 March 2016. The purchase of the former Magistrates Court building (£775,000) would increase the Council's landholding to support a possible future phase of town centre development. Referring to the new schemes in the programme, Members requested further information on the location of the amenity land adjacent to Crowthorne Road where it was proposed to fell ageing pines and replant native, deciduous trees, and the sites of the road junctions earmarked for traffic signal preventative maintenance. The Panel expressed its support for the Invest-to-Save scheme to provide an additional chapel at the Easthampstead Cemetery and Crematorium.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 14 January 2016

The Panel received and considered a report providing information regarding the Draft Budget Proposals 2016/17.

The Director commented that the key things to consider from the budget were:

- the Public Health budget reduction from the Department of Health
- The Council taking on public health responsibilities for 0-5 year olds
- the creation of a 0-19 year old Public Health service
- use of the surplus to support Social Care services

Arising from a question regarding service changes due to budget reduction, the Director confirmed that some services would operate differently to become more cost-effective. The Public Health team had been constructed so that many services could be done in house. Some Public Health services, such as Chlamydia Screening, had been expensive and it was believed that there were more cost-effective ways to promote Sexual Health.

There would be income generation from the Time for Change commission across Berkshire, and savings were being made by encouraging community assets to run Health and Wellbeing events for themselves. Lisa McNally reassured the Panel that she was not concerned by the budget cuts.

Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 19 January 2016

The Panel considered key themes and priorities for Adult Social Care and Housing as outlined in the Council's Draft Budget Proposals for 2016/17.

The Executive had agreed the Council's draft budget proposals for 2016/17 at its meeting on 15 December 2015 as the basis for consultation with the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, Overview and Scrutiny Panels and other interested parties. The consultation period would run until 31 January 2016, after which the Executive would consider the representations made at its meeting on 9 February 2016, before recommending the budget to Council.

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Particular attention was drawn to the budget pressures for 2016/17, which were common to most local authorities:

- An estimated £256k would be needed to cover the additional costs now falling on the Council for recipients of care who were previously in receipt of payments from the Independent Living Fund (now closed).
- An estimated £358k would be needed to fund known numbers of young people moving into Adult Social Care during the year, many of whom would require high cost care packages.
- An estimated £94k was needed to fund residential placements owing to a combination of limited capacity in the local market and increasing costs for home care providers.

In response to Members' questions, the following points were made:

- The Council did not place people in red-flagged care homes.
- The new charging policy for adult social care services would end the financial assessment for couples; all financial assessments would be carried out as they were for single people. A saving estimated at £100k was expected as a result of an increased level of recipient contributions. There were 50 couples affected in Bracknell Forest and letters and/or home visits were proposed to explain the new arrangements.
- A saving estimated at £340k was expected to be achieved through the review of high cost care packages to ensure services did not exceed the assessed need. Reviews were carried out at least annually and it was common for people's needs to change over time.
- There may be a slight variation in the anticipated saving of £15k associated with the Local Housing Company.