

STRATEGY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3 February 2012
5.00 - 6.04 pm

Present:

Scrutiny Committee Members: Councillors Boyce (Chair), Rosenstiel (Vice-Chair), Ashton, Benstead, Brown, Herbert and Nimmo-Smith and Saunders.

Executive Councillors:

Deputy Leader and Executive Councillor for Housing: Councillor Smart
Executive Councillor for Customer Services and Resources: Councillor McGovern:

Executive Councillor for Community Development and Health: Councillor Bick

Executive Councillor for Arts, Sport and Public Places: Councillor Cantrill

Executive Councillor for Planning and Sustainable Transport: Councillor Ward

Officers Present:

Chief Executive: Antoinette Jackson

Director of Resources: David Horspool

Director of Environment: Simon Payne

Director of Customer and Community Services: Liz Bisset

Committee Manager – Glenn Burgess

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

12/19/SR Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Al Bander, Swanson and Reid.

Councillor Saunders attended as an alternate for Councillor Al Bander.

12/20/SR Declarations of interest

None

12/21/SR Public Questions

None

12/22/SR Draft Revenue and Capital BudgetsExecutive Amendment – Section 25 Report

The Director of Resources introduced the Executive Amendment.

Under the Local Government Act 2003, the Chief Financial Officer was required to report to the authority, when it was making the statutory calculations required to determine its Council Tax or precept, on the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations, and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.

The Scrutiny Committee considered and approved the officer's recommendation by 5 votes to 0.

The Deputy Leader resolved to:

- i. In respect of the recommendation of the Executive on 19 January 2012, to include "Appendix X – Process for the 2012/13 Budget - Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserves" within the body of Budget Setting Report February 2012, for approval by Council on 23 February 2012.

Labour Group Amendment

The Leader of the Labour Group introduced the Labour Amendment and thanked officers for their assistance.

The following questions were put by Members on the items in the Labour Amendment and answered (A) as listed:

- i. Clarity was sought on the relationship between LB01 and LS01. A) Councillor Herbert explained that there was a need to expand the enforcement team and that any additional income generated from penalty tickets would be redirected to additional cleaning services.

- ii. Clarity was sought on the saving of £20,000 proposed under LS03. A) Councillor Herbert explained that by returning smaller planning decisions to the Planning Committee the amount of officer time required at evening Area Committees would be reduced. Given their increased delivery responsibilities, this would also ensure that the workload of Area Committees was manageable.
- iii. Concern was raised that when free bulky waste collections had been introduced previously the service had been abused. A) Councillor Herbert explained that only those meeting certain criteria would be eligible to receive free collections and officers would actively monitor this.
- iv. Clarity was sought on the need for additional staff training as proposed under LB14. A) Councillor Herbert explained that, due to the scale and complexity of benefit cuts, a wider range of frontline staff would require training. The Director of Customer and Community Services confirmed that, whilst an existing budget was in place for staff training, the Labour Group's proposals would increase this by £10,000.
- v. Further information was requested on how the £10,000 proposed under LB14 would be spent. A) Councillor Herbert confirmed that £3000 would be allocated for leaflets, £2000 for staff training and £5000 for website updates.
- vi. Further information was requested on how the savings proposed under LS05 would be achieved. A) Councillor Herbert explained that increased rental from commercial properties would be aided by the appointment of a permanent Head of Property and an additional Senior Surveyor. It was felt essential that the Council maximise its assets and strive to meet income targets on commercial properties. The Director of Resources confirmed that the additional post would improve pro-active management of the current portfolio and work to reduce the level of voids.
- vii. Clarity was sought on how the £37,800 saving proposed by LS02 would be achieved. A) Councillor Herbert explained that the figure would be made up from the printing and distribution costs of Cambridge Matters, and the reduction of half a staff post.
- viii. Clarity was sought on the consequences of reducing Repair and Replacement (R&R) funding as proposed by LS06. A) Councillor Herbert emphasised the need for a significant review of R&R funding and greater scrutiny of capital replacement and works. The Director of Resources confirmed that a review of R&R, including the centralisation of some aspects of the fund, was currently underway. It was also noted that all Project Appraisals would still be open to challenge through the scrutiny process. The Director of Environment highlighted the need to balance R&R savings with any increased risk to the Council.

- ix. Confirmation was sought that the proposed savings figures were achievable and had been accurately calculated against existing budgets. A) Councillor Herbert confirmed that in preparing their alternative budget the Labour Group had worked closely with the Director of Resources and all relevant officers.
- x. In proposing LB13 it was questioned whether the level of union support at other local authorities had been investigated. A) Councillor Herbert confirmed that discussions had been held with other local authorities. He also noted that, with changes to the building cleaning contract and low staff morale indicated through the Staff Survey, it was essential to maintain the current level of union support.
- xi. Clarity was sought on whether the £20,000 funding proposed by LC03 was in addition to the work already ongoing to improve seating in the City Centre. A) Councillor Herbert confirmed that, whilst he had identified this problem over three years ago, seating was still being removed from the City Centre. It was essential to have additional seating in busy shopping areas to encourage older people to continue using the City Centre.
- xii. Further information was requested on the £37,160 proposed by LHB01 for a Housing Projects Officer. A) Councillor Herbert explained that, as a result of staffing cuts when responsibility passed to the Customer Service Centre, additional funding was needed to address environmental improvement projects and understaffing in project delivery.
- xiii. Clarity was sought on the level of extra income proposed by LS01. A) Councillor Herbert explained that an additional City Centre Enforcement Officer would result in extra income being generated from penalty tickets for offences such as littering and vandalism.
- xiv. Clarity was sought on the scheme for additional toilets proposed by LB15. A) Councillor Herbert explained that the funding would provide 'community toilets', in facilities such as pubs, in badly served areas of the city.
- xv. Clarity was sought on the suggested criteria for bids to the 'Celebrate 2012 fund' proposed by LB10. A) Councillor Herbert explained that criteria would be developed that would encourage and enable events to take place in the local community. Councillor Benstead emphasised the relevance of the 2012 Olympics and the Queens Jubilee and the importance of celebrating and embracing these occasions.

All members were thanked for participating in the debate.

The meeting ended at 6.04 pm

CHAIR