



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 10th November,
2014

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Jane Potter (Chair), Councillor Gay Hopkins (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Joe Baker, Michael Braley, Natalie Brookes, David Bush, Andrew Fry, David Thain and Pat Witherspoon

Also Present:

Councillors Andrew Brazier, Juliet Brunner and Brandon Clayton

Officers:

Ruth Bamford, Ray Cooke, John Godwin, Sue Hanley, Mark Hanwell, Jayne Pickering, Deb Poole, Guy Revans and Dave Wheeler

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and A Scarce

47. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carole Gandy, Alan Mason and Paul Swansborough with Councillors David Thain, Natalie Brooks and Michael Braley attending as substitutes respectively.

48. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interests nor of any party whip.

49. BUDGET TO STRATEGIC PURPOSES - OVERVIEW

The Chair reminded Members that this evening's meeting had been called to consider the budget and that Members had received additional information, which she had requested.

Officers explained that an enhanced budget was being prepared with all costs linked to the Council's strategic purposes. Savings

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Chair

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were being looked at across the Council in order for a balanced budget to be achieved, although currently there was a deficit of approximately £1.7m. There was an anticipated saving of £120k to be factored in following the agreement of the Shared Services Board to progress the review of Environmental Services. There were also a number of pieces of work being carried out reviewing enabling services, which it was anticipated would also lead to savings. Officers were not in a position to provide full details of where savings would be made, but preliminary figures were expected to be available in a draft proposal for the Executive Committee in December. The budget figures that had been provided for Members' consideration were those relating to 2014/15 which were also being used as a base for the 2015/16 budget. A balanced budget was due in January/February 2015 and further reports would be brought to the Committee during this period.

Members were advised that a new method had been adopted to presenting budget information for the Committee to consider, in order to enable Members to carry out more detailed scrutiny. The initial report provided the overall net costs against each strategic purpose including enabling services, with the additional papers providing a comparison for services for previous years split into gross expenditure and income. The aim of the report was to enable Members to look at these figures and, if appropriate, pick any areas which they felt warranted further scrutiny in order to achieve savings.

Members commented that whilst they had information for the previous two years and the current year, which showed progress to date, it would have been helpful to have details of all services together with income and government grants, together with a summary sheet containing the overall figures. Officers were also advised that it would have been useful for Members to have received the budget figure together with figures for the actual expenditure to ensure that these were in line.

Members discussed the following areas in detail:

- Advice provided in respect of the strategic purposes “help me be financially independent” and “help me run a successful business”.
- The spike in the payroll figures, which it was believed related to work delivered on behalf of Wyre Forest District Council.
- The ability to provide the detail behind the figures and the role of Internal Audit.

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- The provision of a narrative against the higher figures in order for Members to understand the discrepancies when preparing such a report in future years.
- The departure of the Head of Finance and Resources post and the associated redundancy costs.
- The production of the report in the new format, taking account of strategic purposes and the availability of the same data for previous years.
- The revised way in which staff training was recorded, leading to the increase in corporate staff costs that had been recorded under enabling services.
- Details around corporate expenses and administrative buildings.
- Consistent savings on the overall budget of 5% over recent years.
- Details of the breakdown of the Environmental Services budget including the various Cleansing and Waste Collection teams and the forthcoming review of the service and the potential savings.
- An increase in actual expenditure on Civil Parking Enforcement.
- Street lighting and the decision by Worcestershire County Council to turn some lighting off at specific times.
- The Local Development Framework Work and Local Plan including the fees charged by the Inspector.
- Concessionary fares – it was confirmed that there would be an item on the agenda for the meeting on 24th November which would allow Members to scrutinise this area in more detail.

Officers were asked to provide the following additional information as soon as possible:

- “Management – Meetings Rooms”. An explanation of what this title referred to and details of the why there had been a significant increase in the budget, to include details of repairs and maintenance costs.
- A breakdown of all IT licences in place, including costs and where they were being used.
- The Print and Reprographics Unit – an explanation of the large variance from 2012/13 to 2013/14.
- Income received from the installation of solar panels.
- Details of why the overall spend on enabling had increased by almost £600k.
- Budget figures for 2012/13 for comparison purposes, though with the capital finance costs removed, particularly for larger schemes such as the Abbey Stadium.

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- Data on how many businesses had been helped, and had asked for help and whether the support provided had been successful, including through the provision of grants.
- Further detail in respect of the reduction in Anti-Social Behaviour costs compared to the increase for Community Safety and whether there was a correlation between these costs.
- Details of all street lighting in Church Hill particularly Sandhurst Close.
- The Housing Options team – how many enquiries the team had dealt with and how effective this work had been.
- Local Development Framework – how much had been spent on consultants for the last two year period and what work this had covered.
- Shopmobility – usage levels (including the locality of users) and costs, together with details of the grant provided by the Kingfisher Centre.
- Dial-a-Ride – a breakdown of costs together with replacement and maintenance costs.

As there was a significant amount of additional information requested by Members it was agreed that no action would be taken on the report at this stage. Officers confirmed that the comments in respect of the reporting mechanism and report format would be taken on board and would inform future budget scrutiny exercises.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.28 pm