

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 19th June, 2012

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Juliet Brunner (Chair), Councillor Simon Chalk (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Andrew Brazier, David Bush, John Fisher, Andrew Fry, Pattie Hill, Gay Hopkins and Pat Witherspoon

Officers:

T Kristunas, J Pickering and P Smith

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and A Scarce

MINUTE 19 – MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN – PRE- SCRUTINY

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Committee considered the *Revisions to the Medium Term Financial Plan 2012-13 and 2014/15* report. Officers informed Members that they had been requested to assess the funding implications of a number of changes to the original budget as currently approved and to advise Members of the financial implications of these changes.

As part of this process Officers had reviewed the potential of granting free swimming for under 16's and over 60's and the benefits of such a scheme to those eligible. The Committee was reminded that a similar scheme had been funded through a Central Government initiative which had covered a 16 month period. The current annual cost to the Council of such a scheme would be £71,000, however, for the purpose of this exercise the figure of £47,000 had been provided on a pro rata basis (and included loss of income and additional costs to the Council).

Officers had been requested to review the option of providing pre 9.30 a.m. concessionary travel. The estimated cost of this enhanced provision was £86,000 per annum, with a pro rata cost of £43,000. The contract for concessionary travel was held with Worcestershire County Council and Officers were currently in

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Chair

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discussions with colleagues at the County Council to identify the necessary arrangements that would need to be in place to implement this enhanced provision.

The Committee was informed that it was proposed that as part of the revised budget a further apprentice post be created to undertake PAT electrical testing at the Council, following relevant training. This apprentice would work alongside and be supervised by a qualified electrician employed by the Council's Housing Department. The estimated cost of this new post would be £8,000 per annum.

Officers provided Members with details of a number of budgets which would be reduced in order to provide the funding required for these additional services. This included a reduction in the consultancy budget of £89,000, the removal of the budget for Leisure options appraisal of £15,000 and a reduction in the advertising budget for events and leisure facilities of £10,000. A reduction of £50,000 for the funding of capital repairs to public buildings as well as a reduction in spending on security fencing at the depot and the patching of the footpaths at Morton Stanley Park had also been proposed.

Officers also provided Members with information on the impact of the proposed revisions to the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2012/13 - 2014/15 and the reduction in the current requirement for a transfer from balances of £259,000 to £192,000. In addition, details were provided of the savings which would need to be delivered over the three year period and the expected further 5 per cent cut in Government Grant. The Council continued to be committed to making savings through the transformation programme over the next three years.

Following the presentation, Officers responded to Members' questions and concerns and the following areas were discussed in detail:

- Questions were raised as to whether any additional passes would be needed to ensure the pre 9.30 a.m. concession was used only by Redditch residents, whether the use of services before 9.30 a.m. would be monitored and if so, how this monitoring would be carried out.
- The reduction in consultancy fees and the £65,000 which related to the local plan enquiry. It was confirmed that if funds were needed for this purpose at a later date it would need to be taken from balances.

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- The net return to balances for 2012/13 of £67,000 which would increase in the following two years to £80,000.
- Members raised concerns as to how the free swimming for under 16's and over 60's would be implemented and monitored.
- The Committee was also concerned that there would be an increase in demand for use of the facilities, which could lead to over capacity of the pool and therefore to a reduction in income received (including an effect on income received from vending machines).
- The reduction in the advertising budget was also discussed and Members raised concerns that this followed identification of poor advertising of events as a problem at the Council during recent Task and Finish reviews.
- Questions were raised as to whether a risk assessment had been completed of the impact of a reduction of capital schemes on capital repairs, and the effect that resulting delays to work would have on the condition of public buildings in the long-term.
- The consequences of the removal of the leisure option appraisals funding and what, if any, of this work could be undertaken in house.
- Members were concerned that the expense of a trained electrician's time had not been taken into account when calculating the cost of the additional apprentice post. Concerns were also raised that there was a lack of clarity as to whether there would be a permanent position for the apprentice on completion of the training. Clarification was also requested in respect of the current contract for PAT Testing and any cancellation charges that the Council would incur as a result of introducing this apprenticeship.
- In respect of *Redditch Matters*, Members were concerned that by only making it available online, some residents would be unable to access the information about public services that were provided in the publication.

The Committee put forward further questions which related to operational issues and requested detailed information before reaching any conclusions on the subject.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Officers provide responses to the questions raised for Members' consideration; and**
- 2) a special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be arranged as soon as possible to consider the**

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additional information provided in Officers' responses and to provide the Committee with an opportunity to make recommendations to the Executive Committee on this subject by 26th June 2012.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.15 pm