

## **TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL**

### **BUDGET & FINANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

#### **FEEDBACK ON THE SERVICE & FINANCIAL PLANNING STRATEGY 2012/13 TO 2014/15 (BUDGET PROPOSALS)**

The Budget & Finance Scrutiny Committee is a politically balanced Committee of eight elected members and one co-opted member of the public. The Committee has responsibility for scrutiny of the Council's budget strategy. Scrutiny Assembly members were invited to attend the budget scrutiny meetings, and a number of non-Committee members took part in meetings.

The Committee issued an invitation to opposition group leaders to present any alternative budget proposals to them, although were informed that alternative proposals would not be submitted.

The Cabinet approved the proposed service and financial planning strategy 2012/13 – 2014/15 for consultation with the public on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2011. The strategy set out detailed proposals in respect of specific savings for 2012/13, investments, use of balances and reserves and options for consultation on Council Tax. It also set out the activities for engagement and consultation with residents on the strategy.

The Cabinet's final proposals are due to be discussed at Cabinet on 23<sup>rd</sup> February with the Council Tax for 2012/13 being set at Council on 1<sup>st</sup> March. As part of its consideration of the proposals, the Committee met with:-

- Cabinet Member: Resources & Service Delivery
- Head of Finance
- Head of Environmental Services
- Head of Family & Community Services
- Head of Safeguarding
- Social Care Specialist

Written answers to a range of questions on further areas were also provided in order to clarify some of the proposals or provide supporting information.

Members reviewed the consultation process and attended the open budget consultation meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> January to look at how this worked.

The Committee would like to extend thanks to Members and officers that assisted them during their consideration of the proposals.

The Committee clearly recognised the challenge of setting the budget in the face of the size of the cuts to the Council's grant settlement. With over 200 specific savings proposals for 2012/13, it was not possible to carry out a comprehensive review of each proposal, and the Committee focused on a

number of elements selected by the members. Members recognised that efforts had been made to make savings through efficiencies and to minimise the impact on services wherever possible.

Based on the information received, the members have a number of comments they would like the Cabinet to consider prior to finalising their proposals:

1. The Committee acknowledged the effort that had gone into engaging members of the public in the budget consultation process.
2. The Committee recognised the difficult position facing the Council in making a decision on Council Tax and were mindful of the impact an increase would have on households affected by the recession.
3. Members were concerned about the risk of depending on realising £100m of capital receipts for the investment programme in the current market, and the additional pressure that the cost of any extra borrowing would put on the revenue budget. Members recommend that capital receipts continue to be very closely monitored, and the Committee will continue to monitor this as part of its on-going work.
4. The Committee was mindful that the target of around £2.18m savings from procurement is ambitious and that the savings must continue to be very closely monitored. The Committee will continue to monitor this as part of its on-going work.
5. Members were reassured to hear that that the savings proposals in children and family services that were looked at in more detail (Youth Initiatives, Teen Pregnancy Services, Domestic Violence provision) would be made mainly from efficiency savings and that it was not anticipated that there would be a significant impact on services.
6. If the closure of the CRC in Newport goes ahead, members recommended that a Tetra Pak recycling bank, currently located at the CRC site, should remain in Newport.
7. If CRC facilities are reduced, members of the public must be made aware of which sites are open on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays so they do not waste time visiting a CRC which is closed.
8. Members remained sceptical that marketing strategies such as social media aimed at changing the behaviour of households who do not recycle would produce the projected level of savings, and felt that improved recycling rates could only be achieved in conjunction with a review of containers and collection cycles.
9. The Committee was concerned about the consistent overspend on children in care placements and recommended that fresh ideas are sought from outside the authority to find alternative delivery models to look after children better but for less money, recognising that the children must come

first. Members agreed with the early intervention approach, but were concerned whether this would generate the necessary savings in the short term (during 2012/13), and that costs should continue to be closely monitored. The Committee will continue to monitor costs.

10. The Committee emphasised the need to follow due process for consulting on changes to adult social care services – to ensure changes are communicated to service users, that the impact of changes can be mitigated as far as possible and to minimise the risk of challenge/judicial review.
11. Members recognised the work involved in the negotiations with the PCT about the impact on the adult care budget of the withdrawal of CHC funding, and welcome the positive approach of the PCT.
12. Given the significance of the Gorge to the local economy the Committee were hopeful that ongoing negotiations with the government about funding for stability work would produce a positive outcome.
13. The Committee commended the work of the Street Pastors and welcomed the Council's further investment in the project for 2012/13 and hoped that funding would be sustained in future years

Members further agreed further scrutiny work arising from scrutiny of the proposals subject to agreement by the relevant scrutiny committee members:

- The Budget & Finance Budget Scrutiny Committee would continue to monitor savings on procurement, costs of children in care placements and capital receipts.
- The Budget & Finance Scrutiny Committee would review Supporting People costs from a value for money perspective at a future meeting.
- The Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee would review proposals relating to changes to the Meals on Wheels service.
- The Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee would review Jigsaw provision as part of the wider review of SEN provision, and the options for the Jigsaw houses.

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