

REVIEW OF COUNCIL BUDGET & EXPENDITURE
(Report by the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Planning & Finance))

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At their meeting held on 8th November 2005, the Panel considered the findings of a review into the Council's budget and expenditure by a working group which had been established for this purpose. A copy of the working group's report is attached at Appendix A.

2. DELIBERATIONS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 2.1 As a result of their discussions the Panel have agreed that further information is required in relation to a number of the findings put forward by the working group before decisions (if any) can be taken on the recommendations submitted. These can be summarised as follows:-

- Councillor P J Downes to investigate and report back on the implications of reducing the Council's information and promotion budget (paragraph 5.6).
- Councillor P J Downes also to investigate and report back on the implications of the Council's decision for the operation of the call centre (paragraph 6.10)
- The Executive Councillor for Leisure and Head of Community Services to be invited to a future meeting to discuss the role of the Leisure Centre management committees and budget retention by centres in each financial year (paragraph 7.5)
- The Executive Councillor for Housing and Head of Housing Services to be invited to a future meeting to discuss the housing provision for social and shared cost housing through subsidy and Section 106 agreements and the potential for any increase in nomination rights (paragraph 8.5)
- To request officers to monitor the effects of changes in Government grants on the Council's overall expenditure on housing provision and report the results to all Members.

- 2.2 With regard to the recommendations in relation to the identification of information technology costs (paragraph 4.5), the Panel have been informed that this information can be made available without any additional investigation.

- 2.3 However, having regard to the timing of the budgetary cycle, the Panel invite the Cabinet to consider the following recommendations for the reasons outlined in the attached report:-

- i. That a total spend analysis similar to that in Annex A of the Working Group's report be made available to all Members and for it to include where reasonably practicable the distribution of ALL which is currently shown as Unallocated Items.
- ii. That the Cabinet be recommended to review those projects in the Medium Term Plan which have not yet commenced and to consider the potential for the removal of any items from the programme.
- iii. When considering new initiatives (MTP Bids) the Cabinet be recommended to encourage Heads of Service to accommodate these from their existing budgets, if necessary by adjusting time scales.
- iv. That the Cabinet be requested to undertake a full review of the revenue inflation for the years 2005/06 to 2009/10.
- v. That in considering the Council's Financial Strategy, the Cabinet be invited to recommend Option 3 to the Council.
- vi. That the Cabinet be recommended to take action to make necessary savings now with a linear increase in savings to reach a sustainable position by 2011/12.
- vii. That the Cabinet be recommended to identify efficiency savings arising from the implementation of the Customer First programme at the earliest opportunity.
- viii. That the Cabinet be recommended to give serious consideration to alternative financial strategies for funding leisure centre provision.

3. FINANCIAL STRATEGY

- 3.1 At their meeting, the Panel also considered the future decision to be made by the Council on replacement office accommodation at their meeting to be held on 7th December 2005. Having regard to the findings of the Working Group and the potential cost of new build / refurbishment options, the Panel are of the opinion that a decision should not be taken until such time as the Council have considered and determined the Financial Strategy. The Panel therefore

RECOMMEND

that the Financial Strategy be considered by the Council in advance of any decision on alternative office accommodation.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Cabinet is invited to consider the recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Planning & Finance) as set out above.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report by Overview & Scrutiny Working Group
Minutes of Overview & Scrutiny Panel – 8th November 2005
Council Budget 2005/06
Agendas and Notes of Overview & Scrutiny Working Group

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