

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Comments on the Proposed Budget 2008-11

Overview and Scrutiny Committee One. Comments made on the budget at the meeting held 14 January 2008

Public issues raised;

- That more detailed information was presented last year
- The Council should not be allocating £440,000 to funding the Royal and Derngate Theatre as the funding could be used in other ways to meet the needs of residents
- The council should not be funding leisure centres as again this wasn't the best way to meet the needs of all residents
- That the community development function of the council had been 'decimated' in recent years.

Members commented on the Corporate Plan as follows;

- That this was not a budget for consultation as all that had been presented was a series of recommendations without any alternative proposals. Without line-by-line detail, councillors would not be able to make informed comments on a budget that will be collectively agreed by council. Councillor Clarke also commented on accounting issues and potential inaccuracies such as, Car Parking and Leisure Services increase in charges – where the figures presented 2 options but then incorrectly presented the 2 options together as total savings rather than offer a potential total saving reflecting each option.
- That funding for non-priority services appear to remain the same as last year.
- It was queried whether the budgetary implications of last years Task and Finish Groups had been accounted for in the budget this year.
- Clarification was requested on the £90,000 allocated for Community Engagement.

The committee then commented on the Budget Consultation document 'growing your future';

- Clarification was requested on the freezing of Voluntary Sector grants at 2007/08 levels
- The following issues were raised;
 - That the post of an individual had been identified on a document for public consultation
 - The Council is required to provide some elements of Leisure services
 - Car parking charges will either rise by 12% or 20% over the next three years but the document shows this, for example as 6% 2008/09, 0% 2009/10 and 6% 2010/11 rather than a 4%

- increase for 4 years
- The proposal to invest in IT is not supported by an actual figure. Furthermore, there is only 1 figure in the whole consultation document
- The proposal to reinstate the Christmas lights is misleading. It should be made clear that this is not reinstating previous levels of funding, rather it matches the level put forward last year as an emergency fund
- It is unclear why an example of a council newspaper is used as a way of improving engagement with local people when this was not a recommendation of the recent task and finish group.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Two. Comments made on the budget at the meeting held 31 January 2008

Public issues raised:

- The level of information provided was very poor and the document appeared to be a marketing document rather than a consultation document
- The level of funding for the Royal and Derngate Theatre should be reviewed with reference to the proportion funded by NBC, and the County Council and whether the proportions were appropriate

Members questioned:

- That the percentage increase in vehicle allowances appeared to be high
- What the recasting of the Street Scene Team meant in practice
- Whether the saving of £17,000 on Benefits was achievable
- Whether concessionary fares increase had been included in the budget
- Whether the investment in Carbon Management would be balanced or offset elsewhere in the budget

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Three. Comments made on the budget at the meeting held 14 February 2008

A number of comments were made at the meeting. It was therefore decided by the Chair that the Committee needed to make recommendations to Cabinet.

Recommendations on budget from Overview and Scrutiny Committee Three (Full Cabinet response required)

The Committee examined the Cabinet Budget proposals as outlined in Part 2 of the budget proposals summary document. The committee made the following recommendations;

1. The Committee recommends to Cabinet that they reduce or remove funding for the street drinking outreach worker. The Committee requests that officers examine if the Street drinking outreach worker post has been vacant on a long term basis - and that Officers circulate this further information to committee and cabinet members
2. The Committee recommends to Cabinet that they support the proposal to increase call charges to organisations over a three period to a commercial rate- subject to the word external being added in before organisations
3. The Committee may only support a increase in car parking charges if they saw strong and robust evidence to justify it
4. The Committee recommends to Cabinet that they should support the proposal to put investment in improving Community Engagement
5. The Committee recommends to Cabinet that they support investment in Information Technology to underpin service efficiency
6. The Committee recommends to Cabinet that they should engage the business sector to provide funding for the Christmas lights
7. The Committee recommends to Cabinet that they should support investment in public conveniences across the town
8. The Committee recommends to Cabinet that they should support additional funding to underpin regeneration