

Draft Extract of the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 4 February 2019

O&S Reporting and Monitoring Working Group – General Fund MTFP 2019 – 2023 and Council wide draft budget 2019/2020, Housing Revenue Account (HRA), Rent Setting 2018/2019 and Budget Projections 2019 to 2022 2023

Councillor Beardsworth addressed the Committee commenting that she had asked the S151 Officer and received a full briefing, about the budget as there was little information available on the Internet. She was concerned about the proposed Council Tax increases from the Police and NCC; she conveyed concern about how some people would manage to pay this increase. She commented on Government funding cuts to Local Authorities. She urged the Committee to write to Central Government in this respect. Councillor Beardsworth added that she felt that austerity measures were having an impact, and they often had to make a choice between heating their home or food.

Councillor Beardsworth was thanked for her address.

The Chair advised that the O&S Working Group had met recently and considered the draft budget in detail and had proposed four items from the draft budget for the Committee to budget-scrutinise:

HRA Delivery Programme

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing advised that there is a 10 year plan for the NBC HRA Delivery Programme through NPH; it is based on a minimum of 1,000 more homes in that period. NPH had commented that they could provide more than this target. NBC through NPH had submitted a bid to seek an increase in the cap, but the Government has now removed this cap. The Council is working to the original 10 year plan.

The Committee heard that Capita, external advisors, had undertaken independent verification of the 10-30 plan. NBC via NPH is due to complete 75 new homes this year then 150 further homes every year from 2020.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- It was commented that the Committee was very pleased with this progress, it is step in the right direction.
- The Committee welcomed the new homes to be built.
- In response to a query regarding the types of houses to be built, it was reported that NBC in conjunction with NPH have devised the pipeline and the bid provides specific details on the individual schemes, including where and what type of housing is planned, subject to planning permissions etc

Restructure of Housing Options and Advice Team

The Head of Housing and Wellbeing advised that he had not yet consulted with staff on the proposed restructure of Housing Options and Advice Team. The proposed growth is to enable expansion of Team, providing extra management capacity. It was added that it would expand homelessness prevention Team and create a single homeless pathway team, an additional 10 posts are proposed to be created. The Head of Housing and Wellbeing advised that every job description in the department had changed to ensure the service can perform as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- Concerns were conveyed that this a specialised area of knowledge and expertise and whether NBC would be able to recruit to the posts. It was realised that this is a big challenge. The Head of Housing and Wellbeing advised that he has spent a lot of time re-writing job descriptions. Good quality job descriptions raise performance by 25%. It is expected that the Authority can attract people who want a job that can make a difference to these Posts

Central Museum Development

The Head of Economy, Assets and Culture and the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Safety addressed the Committee. It was commented that a video of the development had been produced and this would be brought to a future meeting. Computer generated images would also be provided.

The Committee heard that the project had a budget of £6.7million, it was within budget and the Museum would open in March 2020. It would be completed this year but would then it would be internally refurbished.

The Chair advised that he had had sight of the plans, which were excellent.

Environmental Services Contract Review

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Head of Customer and Cultural Services, and the Environmental Services Contract Manager addressed the Committee.

A short presentation was given to the Committee. It was commented that the contract is positive but it was also recognised there are some challenges that would be addressed. It was an innovative contract. There is a need to be clear on the goals for example recycling has increased and fly-tipping reduced. In the second half of the year there has been a 10% drop in fly-tipping, recycling is also up 10%, and there will be a further increase following the roll out of wheelie bins.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- It was queried whether the proposed reduction in bulky waste collection fees would have an effect. It was noted that this would have a cost implication of £2,500 per quarter. The Cabinet Member confirmed that it would have to be rolled out and the effect monitored as a pilot.
- Previously a wait of 16 weeks for bulky waste had been usual and often waste had been fly tipped. The Cabinet Member advised that responsible businesses do not fly-tip. Officers are currently looking at the Council's Website to ascertain how bulky waste collection can be booked electronically.
- In response to a comment that the main NCC refuse site is closed two days a week and this is perceived to increase fly tipping, the Cabinet Member advised that there is always a facility open and available 7 days a week but it might be in different locations of the borough; it would however be useful for there to be flexibility in the opening hours, such as earlier opening.
- The Committee supported the proposed reduction in bulky waste collection fees and suggested there is a need for enforcement action for fly-tipping. The Cabinet Member for Environment advised that there would be more enforcement action and that CCTV would not necessarily solve it. He informed the Committee of another Local Authority that had introduced a "mobile tip service" which had not been successful therefore the Authority would not be introduced that but is very open to suggestions.
- Regarding the collection of bulky waste, it would be asked what the waste comprised so that any health and safety implications could be dealt with.

Sacrificial Sacks

It is proposed that the trial would go from April 2019. There are 18,000 properties in the borough that do not have recycling bins. 900 homes in Far Cotton have been chosen to trial the sacks.

The Wardens work hard in Far Cotton regarding littering enforcement. Warden keen to catch people dropping litter incorrectly. It is proposed to be a one year trial. If successful, the trial will then move on to other areas. There are financial implication such as the need for a bag splitter should the trial be rolled out a cost of £100,000. If rolled out over the Borough conversations will take place regarding who will become responsible for this cost.

Food Waste

This proposal could bring in a saving of around £375,000 per year. The disposal of food waste needs to be communicated better to residents.

The Committee supported "caddy bags" and suggested large bags could be issued for the wheeled bins. The Cabinet Member confirmed this could be looked at for the future,

The Committee heard that the disposal of nappies was a huge issue and a lot of work had been undertaken in London regarding fabric nappies.

Review the public convenience provision

The Committee heard that it was proposed to close the public conveniences in St James to anti-social behaviour; this would generate a saving of £10,000 per annum.

Green Waste – charging

The Cabinet Member for Environment advised that it was proposed to charge for green waste collection as a future budget option. It was expected that this would generate an income of £700,000. A number of Councils in the county currently charge for this service. The charge is around £20 to £50 per year. It is an option for future consideration but not for 2019.

Review enhanced tree maintenance service (Scrutiny Review)

Following on from a previous Scrutiny Review into tree maintenance, an enhanced service had been implemented that could generate a saving of £20,000 to £40,000 per year.

Community Involvement

The Committee heard that it was proposed that TV campaigns, especially Great British Spring Clean, would be utilised communities would be engaged regarding waste disposal and recycling. It was expected that any savings would be re-invested to further improve the service plus an increase the recycling credits.

The Committee made comment, asked questions and heard:

- The Warden is the central point of contact for the public, there is currently a record number of Wardens employed by the Council.
- There are various Forums and Groups and it work is being undertaken regarding the development of a Cleaner Northampton - a virtual forum.

Reduction in Shop Income

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise advised that a budget option had been investigated, to offer a range of tenants the opportunity to buy the shop unit that they are currently leasing. The Council would lose income from the rent but would receive a capital receipt from any sales. It would depend how many leaseholders took up this offer but an estimated figure of a maximum of £100,000 was suggested. The capital received would be reinvested into either alternative commercial property to provide income or facilities that would reduce costs.

At this point, the Committee queried whether the Councillor Community Fund would continue for 2019/2020. Confirmation was provided that it would continue for next year, but must be all spent by the end of 2019-20.

The Chair thanked Officers and Cabinet Members for the work that they had undertaken on the draft budget. He asked the Committee if they had any further questions relating to the draft Budget, none were raised. He confirmed that from the information provided the Committee was satisfied that its enquiries and queries regarding the draft budget had been answered and there was no further comment or question.

AGREED: That the Committee was content with the draft Budget and the responses and information provided regarding the five issues.