

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 15 February 2011

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	J Hale (Chair)
	Councillors	T Anderson D Dodd AR McLachlan (In place of H Smith) R Wilkins S Niblock (In place of KJ Williams D Mitchell) S Williams T Anderson A Brighthouse D McCubbin A R McLachlan
<u>Deputies:</u>	Councillors	D Dodd (In place of H Smith) S Niblock (In place of D Mitchell)
<u>In attendance:</u>	Councillors	J Green, Leader of the Council L Rennie, Cabinet Member, Streetscene G Gardiner, Cabinet Member, Environment
<u>Apologies</u>	Councillors	H Smith D Mitchell

Tuesday 22 February 2011

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	J Hale (Chair)
	Councillors	T Anderson H Smith D McCubbin R Wilkins A McLachlan J Williams D Mitchell
<u>Deputies:</u>	Councillors	G Ellis (in place of S Williams) P Gilchrist (in place of A Brighthouse)
<u>In attendance:</u>	Councillors	J Green, Leader of the Council G Gardiner, Cabinet Member, Environment
<u>Apologies</u>	Councillors	S Williams A Brighthouse

114 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/PARTY WHIP**

Members were asked to consider whether they had personal or prejudicial interests in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they were.

Members were reminded that they should also declare, pursuant to paragraph 18 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, whether they were subject to a party whip in connection with any item(s) to be considered and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of the whipping arrangement. No such declarations were made.

115 **BUDGET PROPOSALS**

The Chair referred to the reasons given by Labour Group members for calling this special meeting:

- The failure of this administration to refer any budget savings to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny committees for proper scrutiny;
- The decision taken by Council on December 12th to suspend the relevant part of the Constitution in order to avoid any such scrutiny;
- The lack of any detailed Cabinet reports setting out the details of the budget savings, and their consequences;
- The lack in particular of any explanation of the impact of the loss of over 1300 posts, the restructuring necessary to protect services and the costs of that restructuring.

He explained that the decisions taken by Council on 12 December, were only part of the Administration's budget proposals and it was not bound to reveal the full details of its Budget before the Budget Council meeting on 1 March. He therefore proposed that this meeting should be adjourned until after the Budget Council meeting.

Councillor A McLachlan, Labour Group spokesperson, commented that this committee had a democratic right to scrutinise the decisions taken by the Council on 12 December, bearing in mind that some of the planned redundancies had already been implemented.

On a motion by the Chair seconded by Councillor McCubbin it was:-

Resolved (7:3) – That this meeting be adjourned until Tuesday 8 March, 2011 at 6 pm.

(Footnote: At its meeting on 17 February, the committee subsequently decided to bring forward the date of the adjourned meeting to 22 February, to allow any budget proposals to be presented to the Budget Council on 1 March).

116 **RECONVENED MEETING - 22 FEBRUARY 2011**

117 **BUDGET PROPOSALS**

Councillor McLachlan referred to the reasons for calling this special meeting and stated that her group wished to question the appropriate chief officers on the detail of the Administration's proposed budget.

David Taylor Smith, Deputy Director of Finance, responded to a question concerning the way in which the Library Service would be restructured to cope with the loss of fifty experienced staff who were taking EVR. He gave an assurance that there were no proposals to close any libraries or reduce opening times. He also reported that the restructuring of the Library Service would involve the merger of some libraries and one stop shops but the details had still to be finalised.

In response to a Member he confirmed that the budget resolution of 21 February included £2m to meet the full costs of restructuring requirements identified by Chief Officers.

Councillor Williams emphasised the need to take account of views of users as part of the future restructuring e.g. he had particular concerns about the future of the One Stop Shop at Pennant House, Bebington.

David Green, Director of Technical Services, responded to the following issues:

(i) Value for Money Reviews – He reported upon the progress of the VFM reviews of the high spend areas - PACSPE (which had been the subject a recent call-in on 17 February) and Indoor Recreation (options report to be completed within the next 2/3 months). He emphasised that budget had been set for the leisure centres and the intention was to maintain these services at current levels.

(ii) Car Parking Charges – the effect on the retail trade and out of town shopping centres was noted and he gave an assurance that charges would not be standardised in line with Birkenhead Shopping Centre at the present time and would be considered as part of the broader fees and charges review. He reported that charges would be removed after 3 pm to encourage trade,

(iii) Street Lighting Pilot – He would report the conclusions of the pilot project in the New Brighton area, which was nearing completion, and seek approval for the roll out to other areas of the borough, subject to an 'invest to save' application.

(iv) Traffic Management - He explained that the budget reduction of £150,000 could be achieved by moving towards a more structured approach and programming of work on an area basis, which would reduce costs to the contractor. He emphasised that safety was of paramount importance and the council's key objectives and performance indicators would be achieved through more efficient ways of working.

(v) Highway Asset Management – the budget reduction of £100,000 would be achieved mainly through the use of new technology.

(vi) Highway Improvement Programme – it was noted that there would be an increase of £1.6m in this year's Capital Allocation.

(vii) Major Contracts – the effect of inflation (currently 4%) on the Highways, Biffa and Waste contracts was discussed. The Director gave an assurance that inflation could be accommodated within the Highways contract and the budget proposals included an additional £600,000 for the Biffa contract.

Councillor Smith expressed his concern regarding the backlog of bin collections during the period of severe winter weather.

The Director reported that the Annual Review of Performance by Biffa would be presented to a future meeting of the committee.

Councillor Smith asked if there were any proposal to charge for the collection of garden waste.

The Director gave an assurance that there were no proposals to do this. He reported that consideration was currently being given to implementing the notice of motion to Council on the Benefits of Food Waste.

Councillor McLachlan thanked the chief officers for attendance at this meeting but commented that there was nothing to lead her to believe that the budget proposals had been well thought out.

It was moved by Councillor McLachlan and seconded by Councillor Smith that:

“This Committee believes that no decision should have been taken to allow staff to leave until proper restructuring plans were in place.

Committee further believes that the chaotic and ill thought out way in which the EVRs were handled has led to real difficulties in service re-organisation, and this committee is still not satisfied that it has the necessary information on the services within its remit to be confident that severe damage is not being done to valuable front line services.

Committee condemns the rhetoric of an administration that promises Wirral's libraries are in safe hands, while axing fifty library staff and hiding the real damage to services behind a façade of buildings, believing the public will not notice what is really happening.

Committee expresses real concern over the potential future plans for sport, recreation and open spaces and asks that a detailed watching brief be held on any developments in this area.

Council further believes that changes in the street lighting of the borough, cuts in traffic management, and cuts in Community Patrol could all have an impact on the safety of Wirral residents and should, at a minimum, be subject to detailed risk assessment.

The motion was put and lost (3:7).

It was moved by the Chair and seconded by Councillor Mitchell that:

“(1) Committee accepts that explanations and assurances given by the Director and other principal officers on the issues raised.

(2) Committee believes the proposed budget will protect, and in specific areas, improve services whilst protecting council taxpayers by delivering a 0% rise in the Council Tax for Wirral residents.

(3) Committee thanks the Director and staff for their hard work and contribution to the Strategic Change Programme.”

The motion was put and carried (7:3).

Resolved (7:3) –

(1) Committee accepts that explanations and assurances given by the Director and other principal officers on the issues raised.

(2) Committee believes the proposed budget will protect, and in specific areas, improve services whilst protecting council taxpayers by delivering a 0% rise in the Council Tax for Wirral residents.

(3) Committee thanks the Director and staff for their hard work and contribution to the Strategic Change Programme.