

FINANCE AND BEST VALUE Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report of Chair

During the Municipal Year 2008-9 the Finance and Best Value O and S committee was –

- concerned that the Council's budget should remain on course
- was particularly anxious that the Department of Adult Social Services was taking steps to manage its budget effectively

During the year the members questioned the reports on projected budgets closely, to ascertain whether the reported pressures on energy costs were likely to be realised, placing further pressures on the budget. Members were also anxious that income should be closely monitored, and sought timely information on trends, and that shortfalls should be recognised and reported early enough.

In view of concerns about the projected overspends in the Department of Adult Social Services, a special meeting was held in December 2008 when the Director and Cabinet member were closely questioned on the management of expenditure, with particular interest in how the Department were responding to demand but also reorganising to deal with the transformation of services. Members were concerned that these concerns mirrored those set out in earlier years and were relieved that 'support' was offered to the Department in view of staffing matters.

The Committee also recognised that the Treasury Management policy and the timely actions of officers had enabled Wirral to react promptly to the changing market, so reducing the Authority's exposure as the world financial situation deteriorated.

In January 2009 the members received detailed reports on the assumptions driving the Strategic Asset Review. The need for a review was recognised but members had particular concerns about the direction of the review, the impact on local services, and questioned whether the projected investment should be in major centres or would be better directed into to improving the condition of locally accessible facilities. Members remained anxious that the committees views were not reflected in the Cabinet's deliberations though appreciated that the review of office accommodation was being progressed albeit not as quickly as they hoped to make early savings in that area of the budget.

Councillor PN Gilchrist