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Date of meeting Thursday, 24th January, 2013
Time 7.00 pm
Venue Committee Room 1. Civic Offices, Merrial Street,
Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffs ST5 2AG
Contact Louise Stevenson ext 2250

Transformation and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

PART 1- OPEN AGENDA

- 3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS** (Pages 1 - 4)
To consider the minutes of the previous meeting of this Committee held on 10 December 2012.
- 4 COUNCIL PLAN 2013-14 TO 2015-16**
The Head of Business Improvements and Partnerships will provide a presentation on the Council Plan 2013-14 to 2015-16 at the meeting.
- 6a Feedback from the Budget Scrutiny Cafe** (Pages 5 - 6)
To receive the feedback from the Budget Scrutiny Café that took place on 17 January 2013.

Members: Councillors Mrs Burgess, Clarke, Fear, Hambleton, Mrs Hambleton, Mrs Heames (Vice-Chair), Howells, Jones, Lawton, Mrs Peers, Mrs Shenton (Chair), Stringer and Waring

'Members of the Council: If you identify any personal training / development requirements from the items included in this agenda or through issues raised during the meeting, please bring them to the attention of the Committee Clerk at the close of the meeting'

Officers will be in attendance prior to the meeting for informal discussions on agenda items.

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Public Document Pack Agenda Item 3

TRANSFORMATION AND RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 10th December, 2012

Present:- Councillor Mrs Elizabeth Shenton – in the Chair

Councillors Mrs Burgess, Jones, Stringer and Waring

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Howells, Cllr Mrs Hambleton, Cllr Hambleton, Cllr Mrs Heames, Cllr Lawton and Cllr Mrs Peers.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November be agreed as a correct record.

4. THE BUDGET CONSULTATION PROCESS

A report was submitted to update the Committee on the six-week budget consultation process that had been held during October and November 2012. This was the first major budget consultation for a number of years and the responses and comments from the public would help the borough council as it considered spending pressures and priorities over the next two financial years. The consultation exercise had included many different approaches in an attempt to reach as many residents as possible including face to face consultation, public meetings and a budget questionnaire. The process was still not completed as there would be a debriefing session with the Head of Communications, The Council Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Budget and Finance following which a more detailed breakdown of the responses could be provided to Members. All costs associated with the consultation exercise had been met from the existing budget.

Members stated that they were pleased to see the consultation being carried out but requested that consideration be given to starting the process earlier in the future. A question was raised regarding the age range of the people approached to participate in the consultation. Officers stated that those approached had been Council Tax payers which therefore covered a broad range and that a consultation event had been held at Keele University so as not to exclude students.

Members also suggested that in the future the consultation exercise could be undertaken in 2 stages as well as being started earlier, with the first stage commencing in June. Officers agreed that this could be built into future plans.

The Committee thanked the Communications Team for its hard work on the consultation exercise.

Resolved: That the comments of this Committee be fed back to Cabinet at its meeting on 12th December 2012.

5. CAPITAL STRATEGY 2013-2016

A report was submitted to allow the Committee to consider the Capital Strategy for 2013 to 2016.

The purpose of the Capital Strategy was to set out how the Council proposed to deploy its capital resources in order to assist it to achieve its corporate and service objectives. It took into account other relevant Council strategies, policies and plans and the views of partners and stakeholders with whom the Council was involved. It also took account of the resources which were likely to be available to the Council to fund capital investment and the effect of that investment on the Council's revenue budget. It covered the period 2013 to 2016 and served as a useful point of reference when determining or reviewing the Council's Capital Programme. Following consideration by Cabinet on 16 January 2013, the Strategy would be submitted to Council on 27 February 2013 for final approval.

Officers stated that the Council was further ahead in the process than had been the case in previous years which would allow Members to comment in more depth on the proposals. The Autumn Statement was still awaited from Central Government and there would be a lot of work required when this was published but at the moment it was thought that there would be no further reductions in the coming year and no more than the already expected 2% the year after.

Members requested additional information with regards to the Revenue Investment Fund. It was stated that options were being investigated regarding invest to save options but nothing had been formalised yet. Ideas had been put forward by Heads of Services to make savings and where possible these savings would start to be made as soon as possible to help bridge the budget gap for the current year.

Clarification was sought regarding the staffing efficiencies referred to in the report. There was an assumption across the public sector that there would be a cap of 1% on pay increases which had been built into the Medium Term Financial Strategy for the next 2 years. The Council would also be proposing to pay the living wage which was also reflected and accounted for in the budget proposals.

Members questioned whether income from advertising was being considered and whether car parking was still being looked into. It was stated that advertising was still an ongoing consideration and that a working group had been set up by the Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee to look at car parking in depth.

A question was raised regarding Community Chest Grants and whether every budget would be cut by 7.1% or if there could be a sliding scale depending upon whether previous grants had been utilised and spent. There was concern about losing these grants where they were currently being used and needed. Officers agreed that this could be looked into.

The review of terms and conditions referred to at S9 was still in the negotiation stage and regular meetings were being held with Trade Unions and staff. Council Tax reforms would be discussed as a separate item at the Cabinet meeting in January.

Resolved: That the comments of this Committee be fed back to Cabinet at its meeting on 12th December.

6. **REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS 2013/14**

A report was submitted to inform the Committee of the current proposals being considered to balance the 2013/14 revenue budget.

Members requested that for future reports it be made clear where the current document differed from the existing Capital Strategy. Officers stated that the general principles were the same with the main changes being to the resources available. The original document was available on the internet.

The Committee thanked the Finance Team.

Resolved: (a) That a link be sent to Members of the Committee regarding the current Capital Strategy.

(b) That the covering report highlight the changes made from the previous Strategy.

7. **ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2012-2015**

A report was submitted requested the Committee's views on the Council's Asset Management Strategy before its submission to Cabinet in January.

The Council's Capital Strategy and Asset Management Strategy were key documents evidencing the Council's approach to its Use of Resources. This Strategy provided a clear framework for understanding the value and condition of property owned by the Council so that, in turn, investment decisions could be taken to optimise the use of the said land/property to meet the needs of the Borough's residents, businesses and visitors. This Strategy along with the Council's Capital Strategy sought to demonstrate alignment with, and delivery of, the Council's ambitions as set out in the Corporate Plan.

Members requested assurance that planning was in place for maintenance of Council assets to help prevent future unexpected costs. Officers confirmed that this was covered in pages 65 to 66 of the draft strategy and that the starting point would be to ascertain the scale of any problem, then devise a strategy to deal with it and prevent it re-occurring in the future. The aim was to be more proactive and less reactive. At the moment there was a separate Repairs and Renewal Fund to deal with this. Members requested that Officers investigate the possibility of a sinking fund for this matter.

Resolved: That the comments of the Committee be fed back to Cabinet at its meeting in January 2013.

8. **URGENT BUSINESS**

The Chair reminded Members that the next meeting of the Committee would take the form of a Scrutiny Café and would be open to all elected members.

COUNCILLOR MRS ELIZABETH SHENTON
Chair

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Budget Scrutiny Café – Chair’s Report

The Scrutiny Café was held on Thursday 17th January 2013. It was the first event of this kind at the Council and so the format was untested. A major factor influencing attendance was the unfortunate clash with Parish and Town Council meetings, which had recently been called to discuss the precepts. Elected members were also affected by the unusual bad weather red warning and snowy conditions; however all of the attendees who braved the wintery conditions felt the event to be beneficial.

There were 8 officers, including the Chief Executive, available for questions on their individual areas of responsibility, and 5 Cabinet Members on hand to answer queries on their portfolios. Those attending were:

John Sellgren – Chief Executive

Kelvin Turner – Executive Director, Resources & Support Services

Neale Clifton – Executive Director, Regeneration & Development

Dave Adams – Executive Director, Operational Services

Dave Roberts – Head of Finance

Craig Turner – Principal Accountant

Mark Bailey – Head of Business Improvement & Partnerships

Simon Sowerby – Business Improvement Manager

Cllr Gareth Snell – Portfolio Holder, Communication, Transformation & Partnerships

Cllr Mike Stubbs – Portfolio Holder, Finance & Budget Management

Cllr Eddie Boden – Portfolio Holder, Regeneration, Planning and Town Centres Development

Cllr Tony Kearon – Portfolio Holder, Safer Communities

Cllr John Williams – Portfolio Holder, Stronger & Active Neighbourhoods

Officers considered the night to be a very useful experience, as it gave an opportunity for one-to-one sessions with elected members in a more informal setting. Cabinet were also pleased with the format as it allowed good exchanges between Councillors.

It was obvious that those attending were familiar with the draft budget, and it was commented that the preparation, detail and presentation of the report made it easy to read and understand.

The context of questions was recorded, to assist the Transformation & Resources Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 24th January 2013. The main themes were as follows:

Procurement

- A breakdown was requested of the £100k savings Are the projected savings achievable? (request for this to be supplied*)

Income

- How can this be maximised with regard to Streetscene/Environmental Services?

Grants

- Why had there been an underspend?

Staffing Efficiencies

- How would these be monitored and managed?
- What are the workload consequences of the removal of the Planning Policy Officer post? (request for this to be supplied*)
- The impact of efficiencies on staff and managing their welfare?
- Is anything in hand regarding shared services?

Town Centre

- Regeneration plans?
- What is the vision for the future?
- Ensuring value for money with the Town Centre Manager role?

Cuts to Local Government Funding

- What effect would the cuts have on priorities?

In summary the format of the evening worked well and it would be worthwhile to repeat the exercise in future years for the budget. Other scrutiny topics might also benefit from a café style event, and it was suggested that an occasional 'Cabinet Questions' could be introduced and follow along similar lines.

Cllr Elizabeth Shenton
Chair, Transformation & Resources Scrutiny