

Monday 4 February 2008
at 6.00pm



Scrutiny Committee

MEMBERSHIP:-

Councillor MARSDEN (Chairman) Councillor SZANTO (Deputy Chairman), Councillors BELSEY, Mrs HEAPS, PURCHESE, Mrs SALSBURY and Miss WOODALL.

17 Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2007 were submitted and approved and the Chairman was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

18 Declarations of Interest.

None were received.

19 Council Budget 2008/2009

The committee considered the report of the Directors Group advising Members of the detailed budget proposals for 2008/09 covering General Fund Revenue, Housing Revenue, Capital Expenditure and Treasury Management due for recommendation to Cabinet on 6 February 2008 and then full Council on 20 February 2008.

The report set out budget proposals for 2008/2009 covering the Council's General Fund Revenue Account and Housing Revenue Account. In relation to each the report set out:

- The budget position in relation to 2007/2008 and any implications for future years;
- The resources available for 2008/2009;
- Feedback from consultation with the public and other stakeholders;
- 2008/2009 budget proposals;
- Risks, contingencies and reserves;
- The outlook for 2009/2010 and beyond

Detailed proposals for the Council's Capital spend for 2008-09 and years beyond would be the subject of a later paper.

In addition to the budget proposals, the report also dealt with the Council's requirements under the Prudential Capital Finance System, namely:

- Capital Expenditure and the Capital Financing Requirement
- Treasury Management Strategy

- Investment Strategy
- Treasury Management Prudential Indicators and Limits on Activity
- Treasury Management Performance Indicators

The Committee were invited to comment on the proposals detailed.

The Chairman queried the level of Government grant and the steps taken to comment on the level of grant given this year. The Assistant Director – Financial Management advised the committee that work was being undertaken with the LGA in responding to the level of grant and that each individual Council was also being encouraged to do so in addition to the LGA response. The committee expressed deep concern regarding the level of grant and asked that the appropriate steps be taken to join other Councils and seek improvement.

The Chairman also raised concerns regarding the Concessionary Fares Scheme and the problems that the Council would now face as a result – the Council were still unaware of the true cost of the scheme. The Assistant Director – Financial Management advised the committee that representations would also be made regarding the Concessionary Fares and that Brighton and Hove Council were currently joining forces with other Councils across the County to lobby the Government regarding the scheme. The Committee again expressed deep concern regarding Concessionary Fares scheme and welcomed the joint working with Brighton and Hove and other Councils in lobbying the Government.

The Members also raised queries regarding how risk was measured and how provisions were made to mitigate against perceived risk. The committee made reference to the provision of an additional £250,000 for further improved services to residents and were advised that this would form part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy where it would be decided how the funds would be spent.

The Committee considered the Budget Growth and Savings Items (appendix b). The Members agreed that whilst they understood the necessity for service reductions they were concerned about the job losses proposed and the effects that this would have on service provision.

Councillor Marsden highlighted the additional £90,000 devolved spending for new initiatives. Councillor Stanley Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Finance Spokesperson advised the committee that this sum had been set aside for one-off ward projects. Residents would be able to come forward with suggested schemes to improve their area; £10,000 would be allocated to each ward. The committee agreed that this would need clear guidelines, with a defined audit trail. Councillor Stanley suggested it may be a scheme that the Scrutiny Committee could monitor as part of their annual programme. Councillor Purchase stated that many other councils had provided similar schemes and they would be contacted to observe best practice.

Councillor Belsey raised concerns regarding the loss of the Mayor's Sunday and Annual Council events. Councillor Stanley advised that other methods

of celebrating the town's heritage would be explored to provide events that held more value to residents including improving links with church and other religious groups within Eastbourne.

The Chairman raised concerns regarding the proposed increases in theatre income targets and the reduction in direct marketing of Eastbourne as a conference venue. This could lead to potential risks for the Council and the town's economy. Councillor Stanley advised the committee that changes in conference marketing were proposed but that this would be monitored closely. Contingency funding would be available if required. Councillor Marsden suggested that this could be monitored by the Scrutiny Committee.

Concerns were also expressed at the reduction in the staff training budget – Councillor Stanley advised that the Council would be under going a full restructure to help drive down costs and that the methods and provision of training would also be reviewed.

The Committee queried charging for Airbourne and how it would be achieved. Councillor Stanley advised that this was still under consideration and that it would assist in profiling and counting attendance at the event which in turn would help attract sponsors for future years.

Finally the Committee raised concerns on the pressure to cover the gap in funding available year on year and recognised that risk was inherent with any budget process.

RESOLVED: (1) That the comments and concerns of the Committee be presented to Cabinet at their meeting on 6 February 2008.
(2) That the Committee requests that their comments be considered when discussing the budget proposals for 2008/2009.

20 Data Quality Strategy

The committee considered the report of the Assistant Director – Strategy and Democracy requesting members endorse the Data Quality Strategy and associated action plan for Eastbourne.

Members were advised that the Council had undergone its second annual Data Quality Audit based primarily around the management Best Value Performance Indicators and other management information. The judgement from the audit stated that the Council had not made sufficient advances in its data quality management processes to reach Level 2 and 3 performance Indicators were qualified as a result of the testing.

The main areas of weakness had been identified as:

- Lack of visible corporate/strategic monitoring of Data Quality
- Issues regarding systems and training in order to adequately provide and evidence data returns
- Awareness and use of up-to-date guidance
- Need for an overarching Data Quality Strategy to be in place

As a result a Data Quality Strategy had been developed using Data Quality Audit recommendations, existing strategies and consultation with Officers. A copy of the proposed Strategy was attached for endorsement.

The roles and responsibilities of staff, managers and Members were clearly defined as well as the central supporting role of the Policy and Performance Officer. A key area for members to note was the role of the Scrutiny Committee as the lead body for monitoring performance and data on behalf of the Council.

The Strategy and Action Plan would be reviewed on an annual basis in order to ensure it was up-to-date and takes into account any best practice identified through the year and the steps needed to achieve continuous improvement in the Council's data quality work.

The committee agreed that the Data Quality Strategy was just the first step in rationalising and improving the data quality processes across the Council. It was important that everyone signed up to the principles and was committed to working through the action plan and maintaining data quality as a priority for ensuring robust performance management across all services.

The committee thanked the Policy and Performance Officer for his efforts in creation of the strategy.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be advised that Scrutiny Committee endorse the Data Quality Strategy.

The meeting finished at 7.25 pm.

**Councillor Marsden
Chairman**