



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 1st December 2014

PRESENT : Cllrs. Lugg (Chair), S. Witts (Vice-Chair), Haigh, Hanman, Wilson, Ravenhill, Field, Dee, Taylor, Beeley, Hansdot, Toleman, Pullen

Others in Attendance

Cllr James, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture

Cllr Porter, Cabinet Member for Environment

Cllr Norman, Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources

Cllr Dallimore, Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods

Councillor Organ, Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Leisure

Mr M Shields, Director of Services and Neighbourhoods

Mr R Cook, Head of Neighbourhood Services

Mr A Cummings, Financial Management Accountant

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. Gravells and Lewis

57. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

58. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2014 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

59. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

Councillor Smith addressed the Committee from the public gallery and asked the Leader of the Council if free car parking in Council owned car parks would be available on 'Small Business Saturday'. Councillor James responded that parking would be free after 3 pm.

60. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions or deputations.

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61. DRAFT MONEY PLAN 2015/20 AND BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR CONSULTATION 2015/16

The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Members to the meeting.

Introduction to the Report

Councillor James, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture, introduced the report on the Money Plan Framework which also included draft budget proposals for consultation for 2015/16. Councillor James set out the savings which had been achieved to date and explained that the proposals contained a range of targets across all portfolios in 2015/16 which would be delivered by reductions in partnership/contract costs, increased efficiencies and service transformations. Councillor James commented that despite the financial pressures and challenges that there would be a further freeze in Council Tax for the fifth consecutive year. Councillor James added that the report would be updated following the Chancellor's Autumn Statement on 3 December. However, it was not anticipated that the Chancellor's Statement would result in any major changes.

Councillor Norman, Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, echoed the comments of Councillor James, and stressed the importance of the Council continuing to deliver a sustainable financial plan. He explained that the planned freeze on Council Tax would be funded through a further allocation of a specific Government grant given to support such proposals. Councillor Norman concluded the introduction by stating that the proposals had been developed to meet the ongoing financial challenges facing the Council and to mitigate the impact on front-line services whilst continuing to focus on increased efficiencies and strong, responsible financial management.

Each Cabinet Member then presented their respective portfolios in turn.

REGENERATION AND CULTURE – COUNCILLOR JAMES

Councillor James confirmed that there were 121 staff working in the services contained within his portfolio.

Headlines for the Portfolio

1. £50K on the markets service would not be achieved because of delays with negotiations on the Indoor Market. Hempsted Meadows had been taken over by a private contractor. Subject to the markets strategy being approved by Cabinet it was possible that other parts of the markets service would go out to private contractors.
2. The review of the Guildhall and Museums Services was nearing completion and would be presented to Cabinet in the New Year.
3. A final set of proposals for the restructure in Asset Management would be presented to the Organisational Development Committee before Christmas. The savings target was £100K.
4. Budget savings would be achieved by a combination of measures and a review of operational processes. Charges were being reviewed for planning

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- fees and the Building Control service. Additionally, the opportunity for a shared Building Control service with another authority continued to be explored.
5. In terms of new income streams, sponsorship opportunities would continue to be pursued such as the 'Welcome to Gloucester' signs.
 6. Priorities for the Regeneration and Culture portfolio were seen to be:-
 - Delivering City Centre projects such as the Southgate Street Townscape scheme.
 - The Indoor Market project.
 - Regeneration of Blackfriars and King's Quarter.
 - Joint Core Strategy and City Plan.
 - Rugby World Cup.
 - Guildhall and Museum review.

Questions from the Committee to Councillor James

1. A Member asked for details of the previous year's budget pressures. The Financial Management Accountant responded that this information had been contained in the Financial Monitoring report which had been presented to the Committee in 10 November 2014. The Member commented that it would have been useful to have had that information incorporated in the budget report.
2. There was a query relating to Marketing Gloucester's role in obtaining sponsorship and whether there were any plans to reduce the funding from the City to Marketing Gloucester. Councillor James said that Marketing Gloucester had been successful in achieving sponsorship for events and that there were no plans to cut the funding given to them in the proposals before Members.
3. The Committee noted that the review of Cultural Services would come to Cabinet in the New Year.
4. A Member asked why Appendix 2 showed an increase in national insurance contributions for the 2015/16 year only and queried why this was not ongoing. The Financial Management Accountant explained that this was a one off increase related to a change in rates in the Employer's national insurance contribution.
5. The Committee requested clarification on three items in Appendix 4. It was agreed that this information would be provided to Members separately.
6. There was a query on works to Horsbere Brook in Appendix 4. It was confirmed that this related to flood alleviation works and that funding would be sought to meet these costs.
7. A Member asked why there were no efficiency savings shown for 2015/16 in Appendix 1. The Financial Management Accountant responded that 2015/16 already had a detailed programme of proposed savings. The figures for 2016/17 onwards provided a basic indication of the level of savings required.

ENVIRONMENT – COUNCILLOR PORTER

Councillor Porter confirmed that there were 36 staff working in the services within his portfolio.

Headlines for the Portfolio

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1. There was additional pressure on the portfolio to find an extra £0.5M worth of savings whilst maintaining the existing savings programme.
2. There was no anticipated reduction in income streams. However, opportunities to increase the income at the Cemeteries and Crematorium were being explored. This service was highly regarded by the residents of Gloucester.
3. Savings from the Environmental Planning Service would not be realised in 2014/15, but would be achieved as part of the 2015/16 budget setting.
4. The highest budget saving option included in the portfolio was the additional £0.5M worth of savings to be found from the Amey contract which was the single largest area of spending in the Council's overall budget. Negotiations were ongoing with Amey to identify where these savings could be found.
5. A review of the Waste and Recycling Service was planned, The scope and terms of the review had already been agreed. The aim of the review was to focus on the way recycling was collected and to look at the frequency of collections. It was intended to increase the types of recyclates to boost income. There had been a successful trial in Longlevens and it was anticipated that the scheme would be rolled out in March.
6. It was intended to make better use of sports pitches in the City.
7. A new contract was being procured for the provision of kennelling for Stray Dogs which would remove the shortfall which often occurred when Amey was obliged to take recovery action against an owner for non –payment of costs.
8. The main priorities for the portfolio included improving cleanliness, discouraging environmental crime and encouraging increased recycling in the City. The new trade waste policy would help to improve cleanliness. Seagulls continued to pose a nuisance and the Council was considering a new approach to tackle them.

Questions from the Committee to Councillor Porter

1. It was confirmed that the Council received benefits from a reduction in rubbish going to landfill. A sum of £50K was quoted.
2. There was a query on the full cost of providing the garden waste scheme as the £180K quoted related to the operation of the crews only. Councillor Porter agreed to provide this information to the Committee.
3. A Member asked where the main cuts would be made to services. Councillor Porter agreed this was challenging and that Amey had been asked to make cuts without affecting the service that was provided. One area being looked at was the frequency of collections. A review would coincide with Amey changing their fleet vehicles in 2016 at which time co-mingling could be explored. Councillor Porter asked if the Committee would be prepared to reinstate the Task and Finish Group which had examined recycling in 2013 in order to assist Cabinet with their deliberations. The Chair confirmed that Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be prepared to assist in this regard.
4. A Member asked if the food caddy collection would continue. Councillor Porter said there were no immediate plans to terminate the collection of food waste, although some authorities had stopped it and others currently collected it along with garden waste.

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5. The Committee noted that an audit of all green spaces in the City was underway to ensure that Amey were not maintaining areas that were privately owned.
6. There was a discussion on seagulls and the new approach which the Council planned to adopt which included the use of hawks as a deterrent. Some Members considered that netting would be more effective. Councillor Porter remarked that this was cost prohibitive.

COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS – COUNCILLOR DALLIMORE

Councillor Dallimore confirmed that there were 13 staff working in the services within her portfolio.

Headlines for the Portfolio

1. £50K savings in grants to the voluntary sector. This had already been agreed with the Citizens' Advice Bureau and the Law Centre. Important to recognise that the voluntary sector still received a sizeable grant from the City Council.
2. £50K savings in shopmobility would be delivered in 2015/16.
3. No reduction in income streams anticipated.
4. Members were encouraged to bid for Members' Allocation Fund monies set aside for Ward related projects before the end of the financial year 2014/15.
5. New income streams identified from partnership working such as £20K from the NHS. Funding from DCLG being explored. There would be partnership working with housing associations.
6. The new post of Commissioning Director with the County Council would provide opportunities for pooling of budgets.
7. The main priorities for the portfolio were as set out in the Council Plan. Partnership working would continue. Upgraded CCTV would be installed. There would be improved wifi for the City. The service would continue to embrace asset based community development principles.

Questions from the Committee to Councillor Dallimore

1. Clarification was given on the application process for the Member Allocation Fund and how the money could be spent.
2. The impact of the cut to the voluntary sector grant was discussed. Councillor Dallimore explained that she would be meeting with advice agencies on 18 December 2014. It was noted that the Citizens Advice Bureau received funding from Victim Support.
3. There was a query on Shopmobility. Councillor Dallimore confirmed that the £50K reduction was carried forward from 2014/15 to enable a proper review of the service to take place. A Member commented that it would have been preferable not to have the figure in the budget proposals until the outcome of the review was known. Councillor Dallimore responded that she was confident that the service could be protected and offered to bring the review to a future Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Members' consideration.

Suspension of Council Procedure Rule 6

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On the motion of the Chair, and in accordance with the Constitution, the Committee resolved that the meeting be extended beyond two hours.

PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES – COUNCILLOR NORMAN

Councillor Norman confirmed that there were 73 staff working in the services within his portfolio.

Headlines for the Portfolio

1. It would not be possible to continue recharging costs for the portfolio to the Housing Revenue Account once the Housing Stock Transfer had been completed in March 2015. The amount of income would only be known once Gloucester City Homes had indicated what level, if any, of Council services they required next year.
2. No new income streams had been identified. However, existing income streams would be protected and maximised wherever possible.
3. The planned move to a shared Legal Service with effect from 1 April 2015 would deliver savings of £50K.
4. Savings of £70K in Financial Services were made up of £15K for the restructure of the service; £20K from the review of the tender for banking services; with the balance of £35K being delivered through shared working.
5. Civica were fully engaged in how the savings would be delivered and detailed proposals were currently being drawn up with them.
6. The main priorities for the portfolio were as set out in the Council Plan with the portfolio having an enabling role with most of its services supporting the frontline services.
7. Value for money and only spending what was necessary would be key.
8. The Council had made a good start, but it was vital to continue to monitor savings and spending robustly.
9. Web services needed to be developed to ensure customers received the service they expected and to reduce unnecessary face to face contact.
10. Scale of savings was potentially significant in the medium term, so it was essential that the Council continued its track record of delivering savings.

Questions from the Committee to Councillor Norman

1. A Member asked what the timescale was for the development of web services. Councillor Norman explained that this would be ongoing with progress being made year on year. The first step would be to work with Civica and targeted groups. The Member responded that it would be advisable to contact other Councils in order to share best practice. Councillor Norman agreed with this suggestion and added that he would be willing to set up a cross party group.

HOUSING, HEALTH AND LEISURE – COUNCILLOR ORGAN

Councillor Organ confirmed that there were 44 staff working in the services within his portfolio.

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Headlines for the Portfolio

1. There were no major financial pressures on the portfolio. However, it was essential for close monitoring to continue.
2. Some changes would arise from the impending housing stock transfer, but these were not expected to have any budgetary impact.
3. Financial monitoring had resulted in more realistic predictions for income levels.
4. Budget savings would accrue from Aspire as part of a long term plan.
5. There would be savings in energy costs at GL1.
6. There were no new emerging income streams, but steps were being taken to protect and maximise the existing income streams.
7. Main challenges for the portfolio were:-
 - Completing the housing stock transfer.
 - Working with owners of empty homes.
 - Improvement of conditions in private rented housing.
 - Working with developers to provide affordable homes.
 - Working with developers to improve leisure services.
8. Scale of savings to be achieved remained significant. However, it was vital that the Council continued to deliver services.

Questions from the Committee to Councillor Organ

1. It was noted that the focus of the portfolio would change with one of the initiatives being to identify land.
2. There was a discussion on the challenges of providing more affordable homes and the need for more social housing.

Conclusion

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Members for their presentations.

RESOLVED - That the Draft Money Plan 2015/20 and Budget Proposals for Consultation 2015/16 be noted.

62. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 8 December 2014 at 18.30 hours.

Time of commencement: 18:30 hours

Time of conclusion: 20:50 hours

Chair