



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 7th December 2015

PRESENT : Cllrs. Lugg (Chair), Hampson (Vice-Chair), H. Norman (Spokesperson), Haigh, Gravells, Lewis, S. Witts, Dee, Field, Beeley, Hansdot, Pearsall, Randle, Toleman and Etheridge

Others in Attendance

Councillor James, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economy

Councillor Dallimore, Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods

Councillor Noakes, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure

Councillor Norman, Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources

Councillor Porter, Cabinet Member for Environment

Councillor Organ, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning

Mr Jon Topping, Head of Finance

Mr Andrew Cummings, Management Accountant

75. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

76. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no questions from members of the public.

77. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions or deputations.

78. DRAFT MONEY PLAN 2016-21 AND BUDGET PROPOSALS 2016-17

The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Members to the meeting.

Introduction to the Report

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

07.12.15

Councillor James, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economy, introduced the report on the Draft Money Plan for 2016-21 which included budget proposals for 2016-17. Councillor James summarised the key headlines in the report and cautioned Members that the proposals could be amended following the announcement of the Revenue Support Grant before Christmas.

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 whilst maintaining front line services.

Questions from Members to Councillor James and Councillor Norman relating to their presentation

1. A Member queried whether there was any early indication on the position regarding the transfer of the New Homes Bonus to the Social Care budget. Councillor Norman replied that the Cabinet was taking a cautious and prudent approach pending the announcement and that the City Council was in the same position as other authorities. The Member refuted the statement that all Councils were the same and stated that some were in a worse position.
2. The Vice-Chair asked what formula had been used to construct the risks table shown at paragraph 18.3 in the report. Councillor James confirmed that a 4 x4 scale had been used.

Each Cabinet Member then presented their respective portfolios in turn.

REGENERATION AND ECONOMY – COUNCILLOR JAMES

Councillor James confirmed that there were 46 posts in his portfolio, 6 of which were vacant. Councillor James explained the reasons for the vacancies.

Headlines for the Portfolio

1. In terms of financial pressures for the portfolio, Councillor James outlined the current position regarding the Markets Service and advised Members that the operation of Hempsted Meadows had been successfully outsourced. A procurement exercise was currently taking place for the King's Square Cherry and White Market. A second pressure on the portfolio was expenditure on buildings maintenance and repairs.
2. In terms of budget savings, Councillor James listed the restructuring of the Property and Asset Management service, and the self-supporting of craft markets through the City Centre Community Partnership which had removed the need for the Council to subsidise them.
3. In terms of income streams, Councillor James referred to external funding which had been obtained for the new Bus Station and for other capital projects. Councillor James informed Members that he was aiming for

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

07.12.15

Gloucester to become a Markets Charter City which would lead to further opportunities for revenue generation. Councillor James mentioned that the setting of a non-refundable application fee for street trading applications was also proving to be an income generator.

4. In terms of the main priorities for the portfolio, Councillor James listed these as:-
- King's Quarter
 - New Indoor Market
 - Blackfriars (including work with the County Council)
 - Regeneration of Baker's Quay and other smaller sites and buildings

Questions from the Committee to Councillor James

1. A Member sought clarification on the budget consultation exercise and queried whether residents were prepared to accept a modest Council Tax increase as the data appeared to belie this. Councillor James clarified the position for the Member.
2. A Member suggested that the risk score at paragraph 18.3 for not achieving the planned budget reductions was too low and should be higher. Councillor James replied that monitoring alone would not bring savings to fruition and that savings had been 'front loaded'. The Member accepted that monitoring allowed some mitigation, but maintained that the score was too low. The Management Accountant agreed to review the score.
3. A Member asked about car parking charges. Councillor James advised the Member that there was no intention to increase car parking tariffs as the overall income from car parking was still healthy.

PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES – COUNCILLOR NORMAN

Councillor Norman confirmed that there were 66 posts within his portfolio, 5 of which were vacant. Councillor Norman explained the reasons for the vacancies.

Headlines for the Portfolio

1. In terms of financial pressures on the portfolio, Councillor Norman listed the possible reduction of £100K from the Department of Work and Pensions relating to housing benefit and the implications of the recent Boundary Review which would result in an increase from 36 to 39 Councillors from May 2016.
2. In terms of budget savings, Councillor Norman highlighted the successful migration of the Council's HR service to the County resulting in £54K of savings; the proposed adjustment of the Minimum Revenue Provision of £100K; and a further £20K of savings.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

07.12.15

3. In terms of income streams, Councillor Norman drew attention to street naming and numbering charges which were expected to reap £30K, and £5K to be raised from advertising on the Council's website. Councillor Norman remarked that this was a good start, but that he would be encouraging team leaders to identify other ways of generating income in services.
4. In terms of the main priorities for the portfolio, Councillor Norman said that it was important to strive for value for money and to provide the best services to the public and to maintain vigour and robustness in balancing the books on an ongoing basis.
5. Councillor Norman concluded his presentation by reminding Members that the Council had a sound financial administrative basis supported by highly professional officers. He cautioned that continued financial pressure over the next two to three years could result in the Council having to take painful decisions whilst protecting the delivery of its front line services.

Questions from the Committee to Councillor Norman

1. A Member was pleased to note the changes to empty property relief which would encourage less unoccupied properties in the City.

CULTURE AND LEISURE – COUNCILLOR NOAKES

Councillor Noakes confirmed that the 58 posts identified in her portfolio was not an accurate reflection as some of these were zero hours posts. Councillor Noakes briefed Members on the current reviews taking place within her portfolio relating to the Museums Service and catering.

Headlines for the Portfolio

1. In terms of financial pressures on the portfolio, Councillor Noakes featured a potential income stream reduction for the TIC as a result of the new Bus Station selling National Express tickets. Councillor Noakes admitted that the Museums Service posed a challenge and that a proposed linkage between the Library and the Museum to create a community hub could result in extra income. She added that the review of the service would result in a fresh rebranded image for the Museums.
2. Councillor Noakes was pleased to advise Members of the increase in live events at the Guildhall and the joint working which was taking place with the University. Blackfriars was also an increasingly popular venue, particularly for weddings during the summer.
3. In terms of proposed savings, Councillor Noakes referred to savings on the management fee relating to the Aspire Trust.
4. In terms of new income streams, Councillor Noakes commented that there were no new income streams identified and that the focus would be on increasing current income streams.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
07.12.15

5. In terms of the main priorities for the portfolio, Councillor Noakes highlighted the following:-
- Delivery of a new Cultural Strategy by March 2016.
 - Refreshed Festival and Events Programme to Cabinet in January.
 - History Festival.
 - Commercial reviews.

Questions from the Committee to Councillor Noakes

1. A Member queried the increase in events at Blackfriars. Councillor Noakes confirmed that the target of 15 weddings had been exceeded and that 16 had taken place during the summer season which was an increase on last year's figure of 4.
2. A Member asked how income at the Museums had been affected by the introduction of an entry fee. Councillor Noakes did not have figures to hand and agreed to provide this to the Committee.
3. A Member expressed satisfaction with the Museums Service and in particular, the new sweet shop, and asked whether there were any plans to sell gifts in the City Council's reception area. Councillor Noakes agreed to consider the idea.
4. A Member reflected that the proposed link between the Library and Museum should be a key priority and referred to the success of a similar enterprise in Oldham. Councillor Noakes responded that she could not pre-empt the outcome of the catering review.
5. A Member commented on plans for a new Box Office system at the Guildhall and cautioned that selling tickets in the bar could result in long queues when there were events. Councillor Noakes said that e-tickets would also be available and that the new scheme would enable other till points to be opened up in the bar whilst removing the need for a staff member to operate the Box Office. Another Member asked for the cost of implementing the new Box Office system. Councillor Noakes informed the Member that this was not public information at this point in time.
6. A Member questioned plans for the catering service at HKP Warehouses. Councillor Noakes replied that this was included in the catering review and that she could not speculate on its findings.
7. A Member sought clarification on the number of staff working at Marketing Gloucester Limited. The Member was advised that two of these staff had been seconded from the City Council.
8. A Member queried the opening hours for the sweet shop. Councillor Noakes replied that it was open on Saturdays and in half term during the winter months. She advised the Member that sweets could be pre-ordered. Another Member commented that he had never heard of the sweets

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

07.12.15

promotion and suggested that Councillor Noakes should issue a flyer. Councillor Noakes agreed to circulate information to all Councillors.

9. A Member referred to the results of the budget consultation exercise which had ranked the Guildhall as the least important Council service. Councillor Noakes acknowledged the remark and said that it was important to focus on the benefits that culture brought to public health and well being.

ENVIRONMENT – COUNCILLOR PORTER

Councillor Porter confirmed that there were 51 posts within his portfolio and that only one of these posts was vacant.

Headlines for the Portfolio

1. In terms of financial pressures on the portfolio, Councillor Porter acknowledged that the Amey contract posed the biggest risk in terms of budget savings, but added that discussions were ongoing with the company. Councillor Porter also briefed Members on the collapse of the recyclable goods market following a world-wide slump in commodity prices which had resulted in a shortfall in income. There had been financial pressure caused by moving Gloucester City Homes outside of the Council's remit, however, £40K would be collected from Gloucester City Homes for the handling of waste etc. which had not been collected before.
2. In terms of proposed budget savings, a target of £100K savings at the Cemeteries and Crematorium would be achieved by increasing the prices of the service. Councillor Porter was confident that the service could meet this target as it had performed well and in excess of previous budget savings targets.
3. In terms of additional income streams, Councillor Porter identified this would come from signage on roundabouts which would generate £18K.
4. In terms of the main priorities for the portfolio, Councillor Porter referred Members to the priorities set out in the Council Plan and said that he did not expect these to change, but added that it would be necessary to look at further partnership working in order to deliver the services to the public.

Questions from the Committee to Councillor Porter

1. A Member sought clarification on the increased charges proposed at the Cemeteries and Crematorium. Councillor Porter confirmed that these would not be confined to cremations but would include other charges such as those for plaques and rose trees.
2. A Member commented that the catering service at the Crematorium was excellent and asked if it was possible to increase income. Councillor Porter confirmed that initiatives to maximise income were currently being explored. The Vice-Chair echoed the Member's comments and remarked that there

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

07.12.15

was a tendency to over-cater, resulting in food wastage. Councillor Porter acknowledged the Member's comment and agreed to pass it on.

3. A Member asked if any initiatives were proposed to reduce dog fouling. Councillor Porter said this was something that was being explored.
4. A Member queried the strategy for dealing with seagulls. Councillor Porter said it was planned to spend £25K on deterrent measures in 2016-17 as had been the case in 2015-16 and that he had a meeting later in the week with the relevant officer to review progress.
5. A Member asked if there were any plans to re-introduce City Centre wardens in order to deter litter louts and people riding bikes in the pedestrianised area. The Member suggested that the move could be self-financing if fines were issued for any infringements. Councillor Porter agreed to consider this.
6. A Member sought clarification on the figure of £18,200 for climate change. The Management Accountant agreed to provide some commentary for the Member.

COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS – COUNCILLOR DALLIMORE

Councillor Dallimore confirmed that there were 30 posts within her portfolio and outlined the reason for the four vacancies which existed.

Headlines for the Portfolio

1. In terms of financial pressures on the portfolio, Councillor Dallimore said there were no newly identified pressures although some non-statutory services delivered through the portfolio might need to be reviewed if further budget cuts were made.
2. In terms of proposed budget savings, Councillor Dallimore referred to work being done to achieve the £50K savings on the Shopmobility service; Public Space Protection Orders; and the Avenger taskforce.
3. In terms of new income streams, Councillor Dallimore briefed Members on £52K funding secured through the Partnerships and Engagement team. She informed Members of plans to review the setting of a Late Night Levy in Gloucester now that the evening economy had shown an upturn.
4. In terms of priorities for the portfolio, Councillor Dallimore listed the following:-
 - Promotion of health and well being by using a multi-agency approach.
 - Continuation of support for the Community Builders projects which had been extremely successful.
 - Continuation of support for the voluntary and community sector.
 - Continuation of engagement with the community to ensure that services meet their needs and embrace the principles of Asset Based Community Development.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

07.12.15

- Continuation of reviewing budget consultation methods.
- Encouragement of friends' and other similar community groups.
- Promotion of the Council's staff volunteering scheme.
- Celebration of our diverse communities.
- Continued pursuit of equalities agenda.

Questions from the Committee to Councillor Dallimore

1. A Member queried whether there was sufficient funding for the 'Prevent' agenda. Councillor Dallimore reminded Members of their responsibility in this regard and stressed the need for vigilance. She added that there was a separate statutory responsibility for schools. Councillor Dallimore reflected on the good community relationships which existed in the City.
2. A Member asked Councillor Dallimore to pass on his thanks for the Environmental Health team following recent issues in his Ward. Councillor Dallimore thanked the Member for his comments and agreed to pass them on.

SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 6

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

HOUSING AND PLANNING – COUNCILLOR ORGAN

Councillor Organ confirmed that there 63 posts within his portfolio and that 6 of these were vacant. He explained the reasons for the vacancies.

Headlines for the Portfolio

1. In terms of financial pressures on the portfolio, Councillor Organ advised the Committee that these related to the Joint Core Strategy and the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy.
2. In terms of proposed budget savings, there had been swap funding of £42K for the previous Night Shelter service to £28K for the shared St Mungo service operated by Cotswold District Council.
3. In terms of income streams, current levels were expected to continue and there were no additional income streams identified. Income streams would continue to be monitored.
4. In terms of priorities for the portfolio, these were listed as:-
 - Empty Homes
 - Homeless programme
 - Working with developers
 - JCS

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
07.12.15

- Affordable Homes

Questions from the Committee to Councillor Organ

1. A Member commented on the number of staff in the Homelessness team and asked if there were any plans to reduce the team. Councillor Organ remarked that a lot of the resources were used on preventative measures and that the level of resources continued to be examined.
2. A Member complimented the Private Sector Housing Team on their recent prosecutions of private sector landlords. Councillor Organ thanked the Member and agreed to pass his comments on.
3. A Member queried why Cotswold was the lead district for St Mungos and questioned what influence Gloucester City Council had on how the service was operated. Councillor Organ responded that it was important to work in partnership and reflected that a lot of homeless people came to Gloucester before moving on elsewhere. The Member replied that people came to Gloucester because of the available services and that with the dearth of social and affordable housing in the City it was imperative to maintain a strong homelessness service. Councillor Organ addressed the Member's comments by describing the success of a joint initiative with the YMCA.
4. A Member placed on record his thanks for the excellent work of the Housing and Homelessness teams. He added that it was important to acknowledge that many neighbouring authorities sent their homeless people to Gloucester. The Member added that he was pleased to see joint working initiatives in action and that it was rewarding to see individuals working across boundaries.

Conclusion of Meeting

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Members for their presentations.

RESOLVED – That the Draft Money Plan for 2016-21 and Budget Proposals for 2016-17 be noted.

79. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 11 January 2016 at 6.30 pm.

Time of commencement: Time Not Specified hours

Time of conclusion: Time Not Specified hours

Chair