

Special Policy Development Scrutiny Committee



Date	22 February 2012
Venue	Town Hall, St Annes
Committee members	Councillor Fabian Craig-Wilson (Chairman) Councillor Leonard Davies (Vice-Chairman) Ben Aitken, Frank Andrews, Susan Ashton, David Chedd, David Donaldson, Charlie Duffy, Edward Nash, Richard Redcliffe
Other Councillors	David Eaves, Karen Buckley, Sue Fazackerley, Albert Pounder, Cheryl Little
Officers	Allan Oldfield, Paul O'Donoghue, Tracy Scholes, Clare Platt, Paul Walker, Annie Womack

Public Platform

There were no requests to speak.

1. Declarations of interest

Members were reminded that any personal/prejudicial interests should be declared as required by the Council's Code of Conduct adopted in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000. There were no declarations.

2. Confirmation of minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 12 January 2012 as a correct record for signature by the chairman.

3. Substitute members

There were no substitutes.

4. Medium Term Financial Strategy, Including General Fund, Capital Programme and Treasury Management for 2011/12 – 2015/16

The report was introduced by Paul O'Donoghue, the council's Section 151 officer and Head of Finance.

He told members that the report was an update of the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), and tracks movement from the last MTFS approved by council in March 2011.

He drew members' attention to significant areas of the report and said that the council faced significant financial risks going forward as there is uncertainty around future grant settlements.

He told the committee that the Revenue risks and the Capital risks were highlighted within the report, and then took members through the Appendices to the report which contained the detailed financial data, including:

The Revenue financial forecast that the council approved in March 2011, and contained all the assumptions and budget proposals approved at that meeting.

The General Assumptions that were contained within the current forecast, such as pay awards and Council Tax.

All the changes that have happened since March of 2011, including items approved by members, slippage from the last financial year into this financial year, and included assumptions about staffing costs.

The updated financial forecast which included all those items previously referred to, plus the Cabinet's growth and savings proposals, listed in detail in Appendix F.

Members sought clarity around the savings target of £465k, which Mr O'Donoghue provided.

It was confirmed that the cost for litterbins of £9k was a one-off cost.

A query was made about the provision made in the budget for inflationary contract price increases for public conveniences from 2012/13 onwards, and whether this was offset by income. It was confirmed that there would be an inflationary price increase in the contract each year. Mr O'Donoghue offered to get back to members with more information if required, and members indicated that they would welcome that.

The Chairman invited Cllr Buckley, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources, to talk through the Cabinet's Budget Savings and Growth Proposals (as shown in Appendix F of the report) for members, and Cllr Buckley did so.

Cllr Buckley was asked whether the Town Hall Accommodation working group could identify the advantages to renting property for staff to move to, in terms of time saved in completing the project. She confirmed that an assessment had been done which showed that moving staff out to other premises, rather than attempting to work around them to complete the project, would show a saving of approximately 6 months time and a corresponding saving in cost.

Members indicated that they would like to see a breakdown in the figure provided of £92k. Cllr Buckley said that whilst the figure was robust, much would depend on what alternative accommodation was available at the time it would be needed; and that all such information would be put before the working group at the time that the work was to begin.

A query was made regarding the intention to limit disabled facilities expenditure to the level of grant received, and the transfer of the remaining Private Sector Housing Grant to support the disabled facilities budget. Cllr Buckley confirmed that an equality impact assessment had been undertaken, that the waiting list would be monitored, and that high priority cases would be served by this grant, and the council would monitor the impact on lower priority cases.

Cllr Duffy requested that there should be a recorded vote, and further requested that the minutes should reflect that a vote to note the contents of the MTFs did not imply agreement with all of the budget proposals.

After the debate and a recorded vote, the committee RESOLVED:

To note the contents of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and to refer their comments above on the budget proposals, for consideration as part of the Council budget setting meeting.

Votes for the recommendation (8): Cllrs Craig-Wilson, L Davies, Andrews, Aitken, Ashton, Donaldson, Nash, Redcliffe.

Votes against the recommendation (0)

Abstentions (2): Cllrs Chedd and Duffy