

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18th January 2012

PRESENT:-

Conservative Group

Councillor Mrs. Plenderleith (Chairman), Councillor Atkin (Vice-Chairman) and Councillors Mrs. Hood and Mrs. Patten,

Labour Group

Councillors Bambrick, Bell and Pearson.

OS/22. **APOLOGY**

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Mrs. Mead (Labour Group).

OS/23. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Mrs. Plenderleith declared a prejudicial interest in the item on the Funded Voluntary Organisations Review, relating to the presentation by the Citizens Advice Bureau, as she served on that organisation as an outside body representative. Councillor Mrs. Hood declared a prejudicial interest in the budget scrutiny item as she had attended the Environmental and Development Services Committee when it considered its base budgets. Councillor Mrs. Patten declared a personal interest in respect of the Grounds Maintenance Review as a Member of Derbyshire County Council, which was a client for this service.

OS/24. **FUNDED VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS REVIEW – PRESENTATION BY CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU**

Note: At this point, Councillor Mrs. Plenderleith withdrew from the Meeting and Councillor Atkin chaired the item.

Jackie Spencer of the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) was welcomed to the Meeting and she gave a presentation of the work of the South Derbyshire CAB. Initially, she explained the service aims and principles of the CAB together with the main enquiry areas that were responded to. Two case studies were provided to show how the service was delivered to South Derbyshire residents. Details were then provided of the volunteer team and paid worker team at the CAB together with current funders of the organisation. The presentation concluded with statistics showing a breakdown of clients accessing services in 2010/11, for 2011 to date and the projected end of year statistics.

Members took the opportunity to submit questions and seek further information on the services provided. It was asked if the CAB sought contributions from clients accessing services. This was not currently the case, but the officer was mindful of the economic climate and this issue had been questioned several times. It was noted that some funding had been lost with effect from March 2012. To date, the CAB had been able to maintain all services through the use of volunteers, although it was possible that any further funding cuts might result in the withdrawal of certain services. There was also discussion about the relationship between the local CAB and the national body. It was confirmed that there was no crossover of funding and each local CAB was an individual charity. Further issues discussed were the outreach work provided via doctors' surgeries, the use of home visits in some cases and it was questioned whether the current funding streams were adequate. It was requested that a copy of the latest annual report be circulated to Members and this would be provided. Mrs. Spencer was thanked for the presentation and she left the Meeting.

It was agreed that the Committee receives the presentation from the Citizens Advice Bureau, as part of the Funded Voluntary Organisations review.

Note: At 6.45 p.m. Councillor Mrs. Plenderleith rejoined the Meeting and resumed as Chairman.

The Committee then discussed further aspects of the Funded Voluntary Organisations Review. The Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) had offered to provide the next presentation and to host the next Meeting at its offices on the evening of 8th February 2012. In view of the anticipated heavy agenda for this Meeting, it was proposed that the meeting commenced at 5.15 p.m. It was also requested that the supporting literature for this and all future presentations be provided to Members in advance. An additional Meeting of the Committee would be held to consider the Funded Voluntary Organisations review further. It was proposed that the agenda include a presentation from Sharpe's Pottery, but not the Tourist Information Centre aspects, which were funded separately. In addition, a number of written reports would be submitted from each of the other Funded Voluntary Organisations that received less than £25,000 per annum from the Council.

It was agreed:-

- (1) That the Committee receives a presentation from the CVS at its next Meeting on 8th February 2012, the meeting to be held at the offices of the CVS, commencing at 5.15 p.m.**
- (2) That a Special Meeting of the Committee be held on 25th April 2012 at 6.00 p.m. to give further consideration to the Funded Voluntary Organisations Review, as set out above.**

OS/25. **SCOPING DOCUMENT – GROUNDS MAINTENANCE REVIEW**

The Chairman welcomed Councillors Lemmon and Watson to the Meeting and it was noted that Councillor Tilley had submitted apologies. At its Meeting on

7th December 2011 the Committee gave consideration to a scoping document for a review of the Grounds Maintenance service, proposed by these three Members. It was felt useful for the Councillors proposing and supporting the review to attend the Meeting to clarify some aspects of the review's scope. In addition, Members of the Committee had been invited to submit their views on this review area and the feedback was included in the covering report.

Councillor Watson explained the background to the request for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to undertake a review. There was a wish to ensure that hedge and verge maintenance was being undertaken to the specified standard, particularly where the client was Derbyshire County Council. There was an apparent difference in cutting standards, it being noted that some maintenance was just to ensure safe visibility, whilst other maintenance was to a higher standard. In summary, there was a wish to ensure that the Council was achieving at least the minimum contract standards.

Members discussed a number of aspects of this review, including the clearance of debris, the need for extensive background information, including location plans and the current maintenance frequencies, which were exceeded. It was explained that historically, the Council had chosen to supplement maintenance at its own cost. There was also discussion about quality issues, the impact of weather conditions on the speed of grass growth and the merits of involving all parish councils in this review area.

It was suggested that a task group approach might be useful for this review area and that this group comprise two Members, with Councillors Atkin and Bell being nominated. The Head of Housing and Environmental Services offered to support this review as his staff undertook the contractor function for the Council. One area that was recognised was communication issues, particularly with elected Members and parish councils.

It was agreed:-

- (1) That the Committee approves the scoping document as submitted.**
- (2) That the review is undertaken using a task group comprising Councillor Atkin and Councillor Bell with the lead officer for the review being the Head of Housing and Environmental Services.**
- (3) That dates for the task group meetings are confirmed with the two Members and that periodic updates be provided to the full Committee, to keep Members informed and to provide further direction for this review.**

OS/26. **BUDGET SCRUTINY**

Note: Councillor Mrs. Hood withdrew from the meeting during the consideration of this item.

A copy of the budget report 2012/13 had been circulated, which had been considered by the Finance and Management Committee at its Meeting on 12th January 2012. This detailed the Council's overall financial position for the

2012/13 budget round. Essentially it built on the financial plan and strategy approved in October 2011 and covered the following sections:

- The Council's provisional financial settlement for 2012/13 with estimated on-going implications for 2013/14 and beyond.
- The Council's current spending and proposed base budget position for 2012/13.
- The General Fund's 5-year financial projection including proposed spending by policy committees and associated analysis to 2016/17, which forms the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).
- The proposed council tax base for 2012/13 and collection fund position, 2011/12.
- Options for council tax levels 2012/13.
- A review and update of the existing capital investment programme and financing available, including proposals for the new investment.
- The Council's on-going service efficiency and transformation review.

The report included an executive summary and overall commentary. This looked initially at the position on entering the 2012/13 budget round, before reporting the updated position. A table was included showing the differences between October 2011 and January 2012 in relation to the budget deficit and balance on reserves for the period 2011/12 to 2016/17. The overall trend of the projected budget deficit continued to be downwards until 2015/16, after which time it increased and the reasons for this were reported. The level of general reserves was healthy, but was anticipated to fall over the planning period as a number of reported provisions continued to be made.

Based on current spending plans and projections, reserves could sustain the budget deficit until 2016/17. However, an over reliance on reserves each year carried quite a high risk. Further sections of the executive summary looked at main assumptions, main changes and the new homes bonus, before commenting on public sector pay restraint, cost pressures and national insurance contributions. There were also sections on government grant, council tax and a summary position together with proposals for new capital investment.

Further sections of the report then expanded on the detailed background and base budget analysis, the proposed base budget and consolidated spending for 2012/13 and the General Fund 5-year financial projection to 2016/17. Detail was also provided on the council tax, tax base and collection fund, together with capital investment and financing. The Service and Financial Planning Working Panel had evaluated 14 schemes for investment and the recommendations of that Panel had been circulated. A presentation was given to supplement the report.

Members took the opportunity to seek further information and questions were submitted, initially regarding the staff transferred to Northgate and the pension implications. Further information was duly provided. Next, planning fee income was discussed. This had been recognised as a cost pressure, as it was projected to be below previous income levels. An explanation was given of current trends for this and Building Control fee income. It was also noted that some planning work was not chargeable.

There was a discussion about local authority insurance providers, with one company holding a strong monopoly. Questions were submitted about the use of reserves and the target to achieve a balanced budget. Reference was then made to the Government incentive for a council tax freeze and the cumulative impact going forward, which equated to £1/2m over the 5-year planning period. Members were advised of the decisions reached by the Finance and Management Committee the previous week, which were now subject to this consultation.

The Chairman referred to the recent review work on housing benefit costs falling to the Council. An update was provided on this review area and it was proposed to bring a further paper to the March Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with the Head of Housing and Environmental Services leading on the review. Reference was also made to the Government cap on subsidy, the representations made for the cap levels to be increased and it was noted that the Government was due to publish on this shortly.

A Member commented on specific sections of service base budgets and felt that it would be useful to undertake review work relating to the elections function and use of the Town Hall. It was suggested that these be scoped and considered as part of the annual focus session.

Further areas explored were the inability of the Council, as billing authority, to seek reimbursement of the costs for this function from other precepting bodies, together with how Section 106 funds were accounted for.

It was noted that the next Committee Meeting would include an item on the Housing Revenue Account aspects of the budget. Members were advised that this would also be considered by the Finance and Management Committee at its Special Meeting on 23rd January 2012 and the rent levels would be determined by the Housing and Community Services Committee, at its Meeting on 2nd February 2012. In terms of the budget scrutiny response, it was again proposed to submit the unconfirmed Minutes of this and the subsequent Meeting to the Finance and Management Committee.

It was agreed that the Committee responds to the budget scrutiny process as set out above.

OS/27. **WORK PROGRAMME**

It was reported that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed an annual work programme, which was reviewed at each Meeting. The Committee was asked to consider the process for formulating its annual work programme and particularly a proposal to bring this forward, based on a guidance document

from the Centre for Public Scrutiny. This would be preceded by a consultation process, to gather a “long list” of potential review areas and it would also fit in well with the report to Annual Council, to give a clearer picture of the reviews planned for the year ahead.

It was suggested that consultation on the future work programme could be undertaken at the Area Forums and Members were asked to raise this at their respective meetings.

A verbal update was given about the review of Early Years Provision. The lead Member for this review had met with an Officer of Derbyshire County Council. A further area for review at a future Meeting was this Council’s statutory responsibilities and whether there was a code of practice on services for children and young people.

A verbal update was also given on the task group for mobile telephone coverage. The group had met on two occasions, most recently on 17th January 2012 and had reviewed a number of documents, including planning policies on telecommunications development and the annual roll out plans of the Mobile Operators Association. It had been established that mobile telephone mast training had not been provided to Members for approximately 5 years. A specific recommendation from the task group was that training should be provided, to cover mobile phone network aspects, including the implications of 4G, as well as familiarisation with the Council’s mast advisory guidance.

The Committee endorsed these recommendations and agreed that a report be submitted to the Environmental and Development Services Committee, recommending that Officers make arrangements for the training to be provided.

Officers reported on a planned Home Office briefing session on the Police and Crime Commissioners, which would be held on 2nd February. An update was given on the Localism Act, following the attendance of the Chairman and Officer at a regional scrutiny Meeting on 9th December 2011. It was confirmed that the next Meeting of the Committee would be held on 8th February 2012 at the CVS Offices in Grove Street, Swadlincote starting at 5.15 p.m.

It was agreed that the work programme report be noted.

MRS. A. PLENDERLEITH

CHAIRMAN

The Meeting terminated at 8.15 p.m.