
EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE HELD ON 12 DECEMBER 2011

EX.165/11 BUDGET 2012/13 – FEEDBACK FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANELS ON THE DRAFT BUDGET REPORTS
(Key Decision)

Portfolio Governance and Resources

Subject Matter

The Minutes of the meetings of the following Overview and Scrutiny Panels relating to the draft Budget reports considered by the Executive on 22 November 2011 were submitted:

- (a) Community - 24 November 2011 (COSP.95/11)
- (b) Environment and Economy - 1 December 2011 (EEOSP.74/11 and EEOSP.77/11 (Car Parking Study); and EEOSP.75/11)
- (c) Resources - 6 December 2011 (ROSP.85/11 - ROSP.93/11)

Copies of the above Minute Excerpts had been circulated.

The Leader then invited the Chairmen of the respective Overview and Scrutiny Panels to speak:

(a) The Chairman of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel was in attendance and outlined the debate, highlighting in particular the Panel's comments / concerns in relation to the Olympic Torch Relay; Income below target; the impact of water charges upon allotment holders; and the Hostel Service.

In response, the Leader advised that the Olympic Torch Relay was a major event in which Carlisle would participate. Although planning was underway, relative costs were not yet available. Overview and Scrutiny would be able to obtain further updates as the matter progressed.

The Environment and Housing Portfolio Holder further explained that the need for increased water charges over a period of time had been agreed with allotment holders some years before. Under that agreement, the Council undertook to take steps to ensure that more than one water connection was available within the larger allotments and work had been done in that regard.

Referring to the Hostel Service, the Portfolio Holder recognised that the charges did not include a support element and emphasised the need to look very seriously at the service and information provided by the City Council. He was quite concerned that the

Council had been unsuccessful in securing Supporting People funding. In conclusion, he applauded Overview and Scrutiny Members for their views on the Resource Centre.

The Community Engagement Portfolio Holder made reference to the terminology used with regard to the Olympic Torch Relay, pointing out that Carlisle would host a 'stage' rather than a 'leg'. She added that the relay was scheduled to pass through areas where there were many sporting facilities, and expressed the hope that everyone would engage with the City Council in showcasing the facilities available within Carlisle.

Referring to the concerns expressed with regard to the impact of the proposed Council Tax freeze, the Performance and Development Portfolio Holder stressed that the Council had a long history of maintaining Council Tax freezes for the benefit of the people of Carlisle. In his view, failure to take up the Government's offer would reflect badly upon the authority.

The Leader emphasised, for the avoidance of doubt, that the Executive proposed to work towards bringing forward budget proposals which included no increase in Council Tax, and would not depart from that stance.

The Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder reiterated the Executive's resolve to freeze Council Tax. He was aware of the concerns put forward in terms of the impact thereof on the 2013/14 budget and outlined some of the options available to address the position (e.g. Budget profiling). The Portfolio Holder considered rejection of Government support in freezing Council Tax to be ludicrous, and the Executive would not on behalf of the people of Carlisle advocate such a course of action.

(b) The Chairman of the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel presented the Minutes of the Panel meeting on 1 December 2011 commenting that the Panel was somewhat disappointed that there was little scope for manoeuvre in terms of charges set nationally (e.g. Planning, Building Control and Dog Fouling). She commented upon the very visible issues of litter and dog fouling, expressing the view that increased charges to address concerns around those areas would constitute a 'win win' situation. Members had requested Portfolio Holders / Officers to continue to lobby central Government.

She outlined the Panel's deliberations with regard to car parking and the serious issues around on street parking. Members felt that the proposed allocation of the City Council's car parks into four categories would give greater flexibility and supported the proposed charges.

The Chairman further outlined the Panel's comments with regard to Parks and Green Spaces; Talkin Tarn and the Assembly Room, the detail of which was set out within the Minute Excerpt.

Referring to the issue of dog fouling / enforcement, the Environment and Housing Portfolio Holder believed that improved education may be the way forward, rather than increasing charges in those areas. The Assistant Director (Local Environment) was

looking at how that could be taken forward in conjunction with schools, greater advertising, etc. It was important for the Council to take a hard stance with regard to dog fouling, particularly bearing in mind the possible health implications for children. He further believed that people using parks and green spaces for business use (e.g. Dog walking businesses) should contribute to the upkeep thereof. That would of course be dependant upon whether such use could be enforced. Further consideration required to be given to the proposed annual registration fee for swimmers at Talkin Tarn and the Assistant Director (Local Environment) was investigating the matter.

In summary, the Environment and Housing Portfolio Holder expressed his gratitude for the work undertaken by Overview and Scrutiny, particularly with regard to car parking.

In response, the Economic Development Portfolio Holder said that announcements would be made in due course as part of the Localism Bill, and it may be possible to lobby Government further to enable Local Authorities to set their own charges with regard to Development Control. She also reminded Members that a review of the Old Town Hall was currently taking place, the outcome of which was awaited.

The Leader indicated his agreement with the sentiments expressed by the Environment and Housing Portfolio Holder with regard to dog fouling, emphasising the importance of concentrating on education and the development of a better relationship with the public around awareness / responsibility.

(c) The Chairman of the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel referred the Executive to Minute ROSP.87/11 and the request that the Executive give consideration to retaining the Small Scale Community Projects Budget which was extremely valued and appreciated in the community. Referring to the Investment Strategy (Minute ROSP.91/11) he added that the Panel had agreed a commitment to a workshop session, post the Morton sale, to better inform Members of the issues/options involved.

The Leader stated that the Small Scale Community Projects Budget constituted a valuable asset for Councillors to assist their constituents.

The Environment and Housing Portfolio Holder also valued that Budget. He noted that certain Members had not made use of their allocation and pled with them to do so for the benefit of people within their Wards.

The Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder agreed that there was mixed take up of the Small Scale Community Projects Budget across the Council. He found it to be very useful in the Longtown Ward and encouraged everyone to utilise that resource. Although the Portfolio Holder could not give an assurance that the Budget would be retained, he said that the matter would receive careful consideration as part of the overall Budget process.

He was also receptive to the idea of a workshop on the Investment Strategy to promote a wider understanding and would discuss the matter further with Overview and Scrutiny.

The Portfolio Holder apologised that it had not been possible for him to attend the Panel meeting on 6 December 2011. He did, however, wish to thank Members for their consideration of the draft Budget reports.

In conclusion, the Leader thanked Overview and Scrutiny Panel Members for their comments which would be taken on board by the Executive when considering and formulating its budget proposals for 2012/13.

Summary of options rejected None

DECISION

That the Overview and Scrutiny Panels be thanked for their consideration of the draft Budget reports and their comments, as detailed within the Minutes submitted, taken into account as part of the Executive's deliberations on the 2012/13 budget.

Reasons for Decision

The views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels will be taken into account as part of the 2012/13 Budget process