

RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY 6 JANUARY 2014 AT 10.00AM

PRESENT: Councillor Watson (Chairman), Councillors Allison, Mrs Atkinson, Bowman S, Craig, Dodd, Ms Patrick (as substitute for Councillor McDevitt) and Layden.

ALSO PRESENT Councillor Dr Tickner – Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder
Councillor J Mallinson - Observer

OFFICERS Town Clerk and Chief Executive
Director of Resources
Scrutiny Officer

ROSP.01/14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor McDevitt.

ROSP.02/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Ms Patrick declared an interest in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct in respect of Agenda Items A.3(a), (b)(i), (b)(ii) and (b)(iii) Budget 2014/15. The interest related to the fact that she was the Chairman of the Council's Audit Committee.

ROSP.03/14 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS

There were no items which had been the subject of call-in.

ROSP.04/14 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2013 and 28 November 2013 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman.

ROSP.05/14 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.01/14 which provided an overview of matters that related to the work of the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

The Scrutiny Officer reported that the Notice of Key Executive Decisions had been published on 16 December 2013. The only item that fell within the remit of this Panel was KD.030/13 Budget Process 2014/15 which was on the agenda for this meeting.

The Scrutiny Officer drew the Panel's attention to Minute Excerpt EX.150/13 as set out in appendix 2 of the report. The Excerpt detailed the response of the Executive to the comments made by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels in response to the first round of Budget scrutiny, namely:

“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, would be taken into account as part of the Executive’s deliberations on the 2014/15 Budget.”

The minutes of the Scrutiny Chairs Group held on 12 December had been included in the report. The Scrutiny Officer highlighted minute 11/13 and informed the Panel that the options set out in the minutes would be put into action to increase public awareness of Overview and Scrutiny.

The Chairman also raised minute 14/13 which looked at the structure of Scrutiny. The Group had agreed to ask their relevant Groups for feedback on the future of Scrutiny and the Scrutiny Officer would gather further information on available models and everyone would report back to the next meeting on 6 February 2014.

The Scrutiny Officer drew Members attention to the Work Programme and the high number of monitoring reports which were scheduled for the February meeting. She also asked Members to consider areas for Task and Finish work to be discussed at the next meeting.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Overview Report incorporating the Work Programme and Key Decision items relevant to this Panel (OS.01/14) be noted.

2) That the decision of the Executive (EX.150/13) be received.

3) That the minutes of the Scrutiny Chairs Group held on 12 December 2013 be noted.

ROSP.06/14 BUDGET 2014/15

(1) Executive Draft Budget Proposals 2014/15

There was submitted the Executive draft Budget proposals 2014/15 which had been issued for consultation purposes.

The draft Budget proposals comprised –

Section	Detail
A	Background and Executive Summary
B	Revenue Budget 2013/14 to 2018/19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule 1 - Existing Net Budgets • Schedule 2 - Proposed Budget Reductions • Schedule 3 - Recurring Budget Increases • Schedule 4 - Non-Recurring Budget Increases • Schedule 5 - Summary Net Budget Requirement • Schedule 6 - Total Funding and Provisional Council Tax
C	Capital Programme 2013/14 to 2018/19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule 7 - Estimated Capital Resources • Schedule 8 - Proposed Capital Programme • Schedule 9 - Summary Capital Resource Statement
D	Council Reserves Projections to 2018/19 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule 10 - Usable Reserves Projections

E	Budget Discipline and Saving Strategy
F	Statutory Report of the Director of Resources
G	Glossary of Terms

The draft Budget proposals were based on detailed proposals that had been considered by the Executive over the course of the last few months. In particular, reports of the Director of Resources considered at the Executive meeting of 16th December 2013.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder reported that the budget proposals assumed that significant savings must be found within the next five year period; £3.939million in total, with £1.839million to be found by 2015/16 with £2.1million in later years.

The Executive had a history of achieving savings, having identified and achieved approximately £6million since 2010/11. That was due to cuts in funding from central Government.

Despite having to make these savings, which included an approximate 38% reduction in Government grant, due to prudent financial management, the Council had a sound financial base upon which to set its 2014/15 budget. The Executive was still able to deliver on their proposals despite savage cuts.

The Executive's budget:

- Had frozen car parking charges for the third year running
- Maintained the Council's ambitious capital programme including the Arts Centre
- Provided additional funding for Council events in promoting Carlisle
- Maintained the popular 'Clean Up Carlisle' initiative, which had been well received by businesses and the community
- Supported the recruitment and development of four new apprentices for a two year period

It was with some reluctance that the Executive required to recommend a 1.99% increase in Council Tax for 2014/15 after four years of maintaining a council tax freeze.

(2) Background Information reports

(a) Revenue Estimates: Summary of Overall Budgetary Position 2014/15 to 2018/19

The Director of Resources submitted report RD.62/13 summarising the Council's revised revenue base estimates 2013/14, together with base estimates for 2014/15 and updated projections to 2018/19. The report had been updated since the Executive meeting in November 2013 and set out the potential impact of new savings and new spending pressures currently under consideration, together with the potential impact on the Council's overall revenue reserves.

He added that it was clear, even at this stage of the budget process, that all of the pressures currently identified could not be accommodated without identifying additional savings. Decisions would need to be made to limit budget increases to unavoidable and high priority issues, together with maximising savings and efficiencies.

The Director of Resources informed Members that there were still a large number of significant issues affecting the projections that were not yet known, but which were nonetheless key to the Council's budget process including the Government Finance Settlement – RSG and NNDR; Welfare Reform Act; Triennial Revaluation of the Pension Fund; and Transformation.

The decision of the Executive on 16 December 2013 (EX.151/13) was:

“That the Executive:

1. Noted the updated budget projections for 2013/14 to 2018/19, and made recommendations in the light of the budget pressures and savings submitted to date, together with the potential use of balances and reserves, in order to issue a draft Budget for consultation purposes.
2. Approved, for recommendation to Council as part of the budget process, the 2014/15 Local Support for Council Tax Scheme.”

(b) Provisional Capital Programme 2014/15 to 2018/19

The Director of Resources submitted report RD.65/13 providing revised details of the capital programme for 2013/14, together with the proposed method of financing. He informed Members that a Corporate Programme Board of senior Officers continued to take the lead on the prioritisation of investment and the monitoring and evaluation of schemes, with a view to improving performance monitoring and business case analysis of capital projects.

The report also summarised the proposed programme for 2014/15 to 2018/19 in light of the capital pressures identified; and summarised the estimated capital resources available to fund the programme.

The decision of the Executive on 16 December 2013 (EX.152/13) was:

“That the Executive:

1. Noted the revised Capital Programme and relevant financing for 2013/14 as set out in Appendices A and B of Report RD.65/13.
2. Recommended that Council approve reprofiling of £710,000 from 2013/14.
3. Made recommendations on the Provisional Capital Programme for 2014/15 to 2018/19 in the light of the capital bids submitted to date, together with the estimated available capital resources for budget consultation purposes.
4. Noted that any capital scheme for which funding had been approved by Council may only proceed after a full report, including business case and financial appraisal, had been approved.”

(c) Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Strategy 2014/15

The Director of Resources submitted report RD.63/13 setting out the Council's Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2014/15 in accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management.

He informed Members that the Investment Strategy and the Minimum Revenue Provision Strategy for 2014/15 were incorporated as part of the Statement, as were the Prudential Indicators as required within the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities.

The decision of the Executive on 16 December 2013 (EX.153/13) was:

“That the Executive approved the draft Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2014/15 incorporating the Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Strategy, together with the Prudential Indicators for 2014/15 for draft Budget consultation purposes as set out in Appendix A and the Treasury Management Policy Statement as set out at Appendix D to Report RD.63/13.”

In considering the Executive's draft Budget proposals 2014/15 and supporting reports Members raised the following comments and questions:

- The Executive's budget proposals stated that “the consultation responses will be considered by the Executive and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel in January”. The Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel did not get the opportunity to scrutinise the consultation responses as stated in the document. The Panel Members felt that they should be given the opportunity to scrutinise the responses to enable them to give accurate advice on the budget to the Executive or the document itself should be changed to accurately reflect the actual process.

The Director of Resources agreed that the wording in the document was incorrect and that the text actually referred to the scrutiny of the budget documents at this meeting. He explained that the timetable did not allow for the consultation responses to come back to Overview and Scrutiny before the Executive meeting in January. He reminded the Panel that they would have the opportunity to see the consultation responses alongside the Executive's final budget proposal at full Council.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive added that a special meeting of the Panel could be arranged to consider the consultation responses if the Panel so wished or the Chairman of the Panel could attend the consultation meetings.

- What was the difference between the 1.99% increase in Council Tax and the Council Tax Freeze Grant settlement?

The Director of Resources explained that the Council Tax Freeze Grant was non-recurring and when it stopped there would be a shortfall in income as the Council had not increased the Council Tax for four years

- A Member asked for clarity with regard to the funding for the moving of the swimming pool.

The Director of Resources clarified that it was proposed that the Council would take a 25 year mortgage to move the swimming pool into the Sands Centre so that there was one leisure facility to run. It was hoped that this would result in a saving on the leisure contract that would pay for the mortgage. The business case would also look at the best way of borrowing the £5m and would include looking at internal borrowing.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive reminded Members that the swimming pool was subject to a business case and approval by Members. If it was possible to borrow the money over 25 years and reduce the management fee by at least £250,000 to off set the mortgage then it would be a feasible business case. If this could not be achieved alternative solutions would have to be considered.

- A Member asked for clarity with regard to the Voluntary Redundancy initiative, the Transformation savings and the Council's reserves.

The Director of Resources reported that there was a saving of £1.89m to be achieved in 2015/16 which was addressed by the 2014/15 budget reports. It was proposed that up to £1m would be achieved through the Voluntary Redundancy initiative, £250,000 achieved from the reduction in grants and further savings achieved by initiatives such as Digital by Default. The Transformation Board would then look to make the necessary savings to achieve any shortfall in the £1.89m savings.

The Director added that Appendix 1 of the Budget proposals gave a detailed overview of how the Council's minimum reserve provision was calculated.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder added that it was difficult yet necessary for the Council to find creative ways to deliver services and to keep an ambitious capital programme scheme to help Carlisle grow.

- Members valued the Small Scale Community Fund but it had not been included in the Executive's budget proposals.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Fund had not been included but it was being considered.

- Was the Voluntary Redundancy initiative on target?

The Director of Resources responded that there had been several applications submitted and significant savings were expected. Some of the applications would impact on services so the £1m target would not be reached. There would be a special Senior Management Team meeting on 13 January and Joint Management Team meeting on 20 January 2014 to discuss the applications.

- A Member asked for clarification with regard to Note 4 of Schedule 8 of the Executive's budget proposals which stated that the provision for acquisitions had been removed from the budget.

The Director of Resources reminded the Panel that the original Asset Management Plan had intended to sell and purchase assets. The Council had sold some assets but had not had the opportunity to make acquisitions which had a good return. The acquisitions had been removed from the Capital Programme until the opportunity to make good acquisitions arose.

- A Member asked if the Business Rates growth was still estimated at £600,000 as set out in Schedule 6 of the budget proposals.

The Director of Resources explained that the estimated additional £600,000 growth from Business Rates had been calculated before the Autumn Statement and this figure had now been amended to £500,000.

- Was the Existing Non Recurring Commitment Approval for the Lanes Income as set out in Schedule 5 a shortfall?

The Director of Resources reported that the £138,000 Lanes income was a shortfall but the Lanes management were negotiating good deals with tenants to keep the units full.

- Did the £170,000 shortfall in car parking income reflect a reduction in usage?

The Director of Resources explained that, on the advice of consultants, the car parking charges had been reduced with the intention that the use of car parks would increase. The changes had stopped the decline but had not resulted in an increase in usage. The Director of Local Environment was to review the car parks charges and usage again in 2014.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder highlighted national issues with regard to car parking because of the change in patterns of retail.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Director of Resources make the necessary changes to the Consultation Responses section of the Executive's Budget Proposals to accurately reflect the budget consultation process.

2) That the comments and concerns of the Committee as set out above regarding the Executive draft Budget Proposal be forwarded to the Executive for their consideration.

3) That reports RD.62/13, RD.65/13 and RD.63/13 be welcomed.

(The meeting ended at 10.45am)