

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 January 2017

Present:-

Councillors R Radford (Chairman), G Hook, P Bowden, T Dempster, A Eastman, R Edgell, J Hawkins, R Hill, R Vint, N Way and J Yabsley

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillors J Clatworthy, R Croad, J Hart and S Hughes.

Apologies:-

Councillors K Ball, O Foggin and B Hughes

* 39

Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2017 be signed as a correct record.

* 40

Budget 2017/18

(Councillor Hart (Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member, Policy and Corporate) attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(1) and spoke to this item at the invitation of the Committee).

The Committee noted that, in line with previous practice, the proposed budget for the 2017/18 financial year would be scrutinised collectively, with a joint meeting of Scrutiny Committees to be held on 30 January 2017, providing an opportunity for Members to comment on proposals for the Council's Budget in its entirety. This would follow the opportunity for individual Scrutiny Committees – as at this meeting – to have an initial overview of the budget proposals and examine them to identify any specific issues or areas of interest that might be considered at the joint meeting referred to above for incorporation into any recommendations to Cabinet and Council.

The Committee then considered the Joint Report of the County Treasurer, the Chief Officer for Communities, Public Health, Environment and Prosperity and the Chief Officer for Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste (CT/17/03) on the provisional financial settlement made by Government within the current and anticipated public sector funding regime and the spending targets set by the Cabinet for Communities, Public Health, Environment and Prosperity and Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste Services which included inflation, commitment and service prioritisation reductions.

The Report also contained the detailed budget proposals for Communities, Public Health, Environment and Prosperity, and Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste prepared in line with those targets, reflecting the different pressures and influences faced by services.

The proposed budget for Communities, Public Health, Environment and Prosperity of £35,203,000 incorporated inflation and commitments of £2,468,000 and required budget savings of £576,000; and the proposed budget for Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste of £56,406,000 incorporated inflation and commitments of £3,496,000 and required budget savings of £5,527,000.

The Public Health draft budget had previously been considered by the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on 19 January 2017.

Members noted that overall, service inflation and commitments for the Council for the year were estimated at £43,026,000 and that to manage those combined pressures and set a budget within Government provisional targets, total savings of £22,229,000 would need to be found in the 2017/18 budget. The announcement by Government on the final settlement and Council Tax Regulations was expected shortly.

The Committee were reminded that its consideration of the draft budgets of Communities, Environment and Prosperity and Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste was just part of the process of setting the County Council's budget which, following this meeting and the further joint scrutiny session on 30 January 2017 would culminate in the Cabinet on 10 February 2017 formulating budgets for consideration by the County Council on 16 February 2017.

Chief Officers, in commenting on the likely implications of the 2017/18 target for individual areas of service, confirmed that demand on these areas to undertake transformation change whilst continuing to provide services remained testing. Strategies used to achieve the target budget included income generation, review of policies and statutory levels, alternative methods of service delivery including collaboration and community self-help and process changes including digital by design.

The proposed capital programmes for Communities, Public Health, Environment and Prosperity Services and Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste would direct resources towards preventive works reducing whole life maintenance costs or schemes funded from external services, maximising investment in the county's physical infrastructure.

The Report now before the Committee also referred to the Budget 2017/18 Impact Assessment, circulated prior to the meeting, giving an overview of the impact assessments for all service areas (available at: <https://new.devon.gov.uk/impact/published/budget-setting-201718/>), for the attention of Members at this meeting in order that they may be aware of the equality impact assessments undertaken as part of the budget's preparation and that any risk assessments and projections were adequate and that the evidence supported the assumptions made in the formulation of the budget. That Assessment provided information on the impacts of savings strategies and a detailed analysis of community feedback and data and views on budget priorities and council tax. Acknowledging also that the preparation of Impact Assessments was necessarily a dynamic process and that individual assessments for specific proposals may necessarily have to be developed and updated with time, Members of the Council must have full regard to and consider the impact of any proposals in relation to equalities prior to making any decisions and any identified significant risks and mitigating action required.

In accordance with the Scrutiny Budget Framework 3 questions had been received from Members via the dedicated electronic mailbox facility which were circulated with factual responses where applicable (copy attached to Minutes).

Specific issues and observations arising from the current budget proposals raised at the meeting included the following, namely:

- the need for Cabinet to take account of impact assessments and ensure appropriate mitigations were put in place where appropriate;
- possible adverse impact on future budgets for services of reductions in specific or dedicated grants;

- acknowledging the benefit for the Council's budget of maximising recycling (through the waste hierarchy); joint arrangements with District Councils and action taken to minimise waste; the creation of energy from waste and improving public education.

Members also identified the following area where the Committee might usefully ask for further information or undertake further scrutiny, namely:

- the importance of suitable basic infrastructure being put in place prior to developments funded, for example, through Section 106 agreements, acknowledging the responsibility of the Local Planning Authority in that process; and identifying further action the County Council may take to reinforce and add rigour to that process.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Radford, **SECONDED** by Councillor Yabsley and

RESOLVED that the provisional financial settlement and its impact on spending targets and on the proposed Communities, Public Health, Environment and Prosperity Services and Highways, Infrastructure Development and Waste Services budget for 2017/18 and the issues and/or observations set out above be drawn to the attention of the Joint Budget meeting on 30 January 2017.

[NB: In accordance with Standing Order 32(4) Councillor Way asked that his vote for the amendment in Councillor Hook's name to seek additional budgetary provision for waste education be recorded.]

***DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The Meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 11.30 am

