

MATTERS HOLDING THE EXECUTIVE TO ACCOUNT

51/06 - **DRAFT GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2007/08:** The Commission considered the following elements of the budget which fell within the remit of the Commission

CABINET MEMBER (PUBLIC PROTECTION & RURAL AFFAIRS) PORTFOLIO

Public Protection and Bereavement Services: The Cabinet Member (Public Protection & Rural Affairs) was invited to present the budget. The Cabinet Member outlined the approach taken to the budget, the key issues and the key variations, the proposed efficiency savings, fees and charges, and the main risks to the budget and advised that there were no growth items recommended. The key variations to the Public Protection budget were an increase of £44K for pay awards, superannuation rate increases and increments, £17K for an additional half post to deal with illegal traveller encampments on Council owned land and increases to support charges of £19K. There would be increased licensing income of £38K and decreases in internal charges of £13K and capital and insurance charges of £12K. In relation to efficiency savings, it was noted that £19K cash savings and £27K non-cash had been identified. The key variations to the Bereavement Services budget were an increase in pay awards of £11K, appropriation to capital reserves to cover the costs of fitting mercury abatement equipment of £85K. Reducing costs included the removal of the memorial budget of £100K, increased income through fee increases of £35K and increase in crematorium fees of £63K and additional income through a higher than previous year predicted use of service. Increases in fees and charges for Public Protection and Bereavement Services were generally 3.9% and 5% respectively. Crematorium fees, however, were to be increased by 15% and there was also a proposed 7% increase on taxi fares. The main risks to the budget were acknowledged as a loss of income due to falling demand, difficulty in replacing front-line staff and additional costs/loss of income through closure of the crematorium.

Questions were then invited and the Head of Parks and Open Spaces responded to queries regarding memorial safety, the improvement of cemetery walls (particularly in Knaresborough) and the closure of the crematorium whilst mercury abatement works were being carried out and the resulting arrangement to be put in place.

The Commission accepted the budget.

(Six members voted in favour and there was one abstention)

CABINET MEMBER (ENVIRONMENT) PORTFOLIO

Environmental Services (including Business Support): The Cabinet Member (Environment) was invited to present the budget. The Cabinet Member outlined the approach taken to the budget, the key issues and key variations, the proposed efficiency savings, fees and charges and the main risks to the budget and advised that

there was one approved growth item. The key variances in the Environmental budget related to increases in the expansion of the kerbside scheme, staff costs, fleet management costs, waste disposal charges and a reduction in trade waste/pest control income. There were decreases through increased income from sale of recyclables, increased income from recycling credits and decreased costs of sack purchases. In relation to efficiency savings it was noted that £3.68K cash and £34.78K non-cash had been identified. The growth item related to expansion of the kerbside recycling of paper, cans and glass to rural and urban areas not presently covered costing £137.2K which had been approved by CMT and Cabinet. He concluded by stating that fees and charges had been increased by 3.9% and that trade waste charges had been increased by 26% following a 35% increase in NYCC waste disposal charges passed on in full to its customers. Risks to the budget were identified as income from trade waste and pest control (regular review of charges and market conditions). £3K cash and £12.6K non-cash efficiency savings were identified from the business support budget.

Questions were then invited. One Member queried whether car parking attendants could possibly carry out litter enforcement duties and it was noted that this would have significant practical implications. In response to a query regarding the Environmental Initiative Scheme, the Cabinet Member commented that three schemes were to be considered by Cabinet in February 2007 in relation to a reduction to fuel poverty in rural areas, a business accreditation scheme for environmental performance and a recycling incentive scheme with the aim of introducing people to the concept of energy efficiency in their own homes. One Member sought clarification over trade recycling and the Cabinet Member advised that the Government did not currently set any recycling targets for this and, if resources were redirected to trade recycling, particularly cardboard, the Council would not meet the Government's household recycling targets. The Head of Environment then responded to questions regarding the use of hybrid vehicles to ensure the most economic use of fuel and the extension of the waste recycling.

The Commission accepted the budget.

(Five Members voted for motion and there two abstentions)

CABINET MEMBER (PLANNING AND TRANSPORT) PORTFOLIO

Planning/Transport and Business Support : The Cabinet Member (Planning and Transport) was invited to present the budget. The Cabinet Member outlined the approach taken to the budget, the key issues and the key variations of the budget, fees and charges, the proposed efficiency savings and the main risks to the budget and advised that there were no growth items in any of the budget areas. The major variances in the Planning budget were an increase in the Planning Delivery Grant of £150K, increased income of £39K and increase in employee costs of £76K. Variation in the Transport budget related to increased costs of the concessionary fares scheme of £136K, increased car park income of £102K and increased Highways Agency Fallback of £36K. Variations in the Business Support budget were an increase in employee costs, re-instating £10K omitted in error from the original estimates 2006/07, a reduction

of £9K in paper and printing costs and a reduction of £13K in Capital Charges. There were target efficiency savings of £14.5k cash and £55.7K non-cash for 2007/2008. In relation to Planning, it was noted that fees and charges for Building Control included a 5% increase in Building Control fees and that Transport fees and charges had been increased by 3.9%. The main risk regarding the Planning budget was that the estimated level of Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) was not received, which would impact upon the improvements in the current Planning Improvement Plan and to put at risk the delivery of two key service objectives and national priorities. The main risks in the transport budget were a reduction in car park income, concessionary fares cost increases and Highways Agency costs increases. The Cabinet Member concluded by referring to other areas which affected the budget and, in particular, in relation to the Government's proposal for the introduction of a free national concessionary fares scheme in April 2008 and the financial impact this would have upon the Council.

Questions were then invited. One Member queried whether car park usage had increased and expressed concern over car parking income and on street car parking charges. The Cabinet Member commented that there had been an increase in usage in the lead up to Christmas although the summer months had seen a slight dip and added that more on-street parking spaces would be provided in April this year. The Cabinet Member reported that there had been a 30% increase in issuing passes for the concessionary fares scheme. In response to concern over the Government proposals to introduce a free national concessionary fares scheme he commented that it was anticipated that Government funding would not cover the full cost. The Cabinet Member stated that the Government had proposed that all passes should be re-issued and costs had been identified in the budget. It was currently not clear what type of card this would need to be but it was noted that only costs for a 'dumb card' had been included at a cost of £1.00 each. He added that pressure was being put on the Government to fund these additional costs and a decision on this requirement would be taken in July 2007. He also responded to queries regarding community transport and the concessionary fares scheme. There was also query regarding discounted parking for residents and the Cabinet Member commented that, until the associated costs and impact upon the Council were known for the concessionary fares scheme, it was not possible to introduce a discounted parking scheme for residents but this would be reviewed. (At this point Councillor Galloway declared a personal interest on the basis that he was a Council appointed member to the Harrogate District Transport Forum).

Responding to a query over the PDG the Head of Planning Services advised that, due to a very good performance, the Council were expecting a good grant award for 2007/2008 and were budgeting for £300K. The award was being announced in two stages. The first announced in December 2006 was in line with expectations and the final announcement was expected in June. He added that the Government were currently carrying out a national study into planning fees and it was likely that fees would increase in 2008/09. In answer to a question from the Chairman, the Head of Planning Services confirmed that the Government had previously stated that as PDG tailed off fees would be increased to substitute, but that this still had to be fully realised. The Government had, however, recently consulted upon a performance related grant

scheme to replace PDG. Responding to a query regarding the Direct Neighbour Notification Scheme, the Head of Planning Services stated that it was planned that the scheme would be introduced in April this year.

The Commission accepted the budget.

(Five Members voted for the motion and there were two abstentions)

(5.33 pm - 7.00 pm)