

**59/07 (5) - Transport / Planning and Business Support Business Units:** The Cabinet Member (Planning and Transport) was invited to present the budget. He outlined the approach taken to the budget, the key issues and the key variations, the proposed efficiency savings and the main risks to the budget and advised that there were no growth items in relation to any of the business units. The Planning budget represented an increase in net expenditure of £159,000, an increase of £495,000 in the Transport budget and a reduction of £1,000 in the Business Support budget. Key Variances included in the Planning budget included a decrease in the Planning Delivery Grant of £225,000; increased application fees of £227,000; increased IT costs of £83,000, employee costs of £53,000 and £42,000 for capital charges. The Transport budget included an increased cost of the new Concessionary Fares Scheme of £516,700; increased Car Park Income of £195,000; and increased highways agency fallback of £83,000. Business Support saw increases in employee costs of £16,000 as a result of the pay award, a reduction of £18,000 in hours and grades, a reduction of £12,000 in advertising, stationery, postage and printing and an increase of £17,000 for internal charges. The Cabinet Member then detailed the efficiency savings of each budget which included £10,320 as a result of a new supplier of Ordnance Survey mapping extracts (Planning), a total of £48,350 as a result of reduced energy and maintenance costs, reduced costs of the concessionary fares passes and new parking income (Transport) and a total of £12,460 as a result of reduced costs of advertising, printing, postage & stationery (Business Support). Planning fees and charges included a 2% increase in Building Control fees to ensure the unit broke even and for the retention of a high market share of business which was open to competition and Transport fees and charges had been increased on an average of 4% in line with the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Major risks to the Planning budget related to estimated Housing and Planning Delivery Grant and planning fee income estimates. Transport budget risks included a reduction in car park income, increased costs of the new National Free Fare Scheme and Highway Agency cost increases.

Questions were then invited. In relation to the Transport budget, Members expressed concern over the monitoring mechanisms for bus operators' payments and the possibility of fraudulent claims in relation to the new National Free Concessionary Fare Scheme. The Head of Highways and Transport acknowledged the risk and advised that additional staff had already been employed to address those risks whose main tasks would be to survey bus usage across the district and examine the usage statistics submitted by bus operators. He added that the new bus passes that were being issued to all users were smart card enabled, which would allow the collection of accurate information on pass usage but only on those buses which were fitted with smart card readers. This would reduce the risk of potential fraudulent claims although the total number of bus operators operating the smart card system would be low initially due to the costs involved. One Member suggested that the bus operators should bear the purchasing costs of the smart card readers and the Cabinet Member acknowledged the point but added that the new Free Fare Scheme was being imposed by central government on the basis that bus operators were no better or worse off as a result of

the scheme. The Council would also suffer financially because the level of grant received from government would be insufficient to meet the additional costs of the new scheme. The Head of Highways and Transport added that the Council would explore funding opportunities through the City Region and would also be lobbying local MPs and the LGA.

In relation to the Planning Budget, a Member queried the Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) and the forthcoming changes. The Cabinet Member reported that the government had announced that they were to reform the PDG which would take into account improved housing delivery and would be renamed the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant and this would see more incentives for local authorities to deliver new housing to the area. A discussion then ensued on the current levels of staffing in the Planning Section and, in particular, the under resourced Enforcement Team.

It was proposed and seconded that the Cabinet Member considered increasing the resources available for the Enforcement Team to enable for the employment of additional staff.

On a vote been taken, three Members voted for the motion, six voted against and there was one abstention. The motion was, therefore, lost.

The Cabinet Member acknowledged that the Enforcement Section was under-resourced but it was not deemed a controversial or priority area of spending for the Council at the present time.

Members agreed the budget.

(Seven Members voted for the motion and there were three abstentions)

(5.50 pm - 6.32 pm)