

**ORGANISATION IMPROVEMENT & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
HELD ON 21 JANUARY 2008
(FROM 5.30 PM TO 7.25 PM)**

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Atkinson in the Chair. Councillors Galloway, Grange, Hawke, Chris Lewis, Reg Marsh, Newby, Trotter, Willis and Willoughby.

In attendance: Councillor Cooper (Cabinet Member Environment)
Councillor Ellington (Cabinet Member Public Protection and Rural Affairs)
Councillor Don Mackenzie (Cabinet Member Planning and Transport)

Late Arrivals: Councillor Galloway at 5.37 pm.

Early Departures: Councillor Grange at 7.00 pm.

54/07 - APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF

SUBSTITUTES: An apology for absence had been received from Councillor Peter Phillips.

(5.30 pm)

55/07 - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: There were no declarations of interest.

(5.30 pm)

56/07 - MINUTES: The Minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 8 January 2008 were unanimously approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

(5.31 pm)

57/07 – EXEMPT INFORMATION: There were no exempt information items.

(5.32 pm)

58/07 – PUBLIC ARRANGEMENTS – QUESTIONS: There were no questions to consider pursuant to Standing Order 27.

(5.32 pm)

MATTERS HOLDING THE EXECUTIVE TO ACCOUNT

59/07 - DRAFT GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET 2008/09: The Scrutiny Officer submitted a written report which outlined the process for the consideration of the Draft General Fund Revenue Budget for 2008/09. A summary of the budget approval process was attached as Appendix A to the report.

The Commission then considered the following elements of the budget which fell

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within the remit of the Commission.

59/07 (1) - **Public Protection Business and Bereavements and Markets**

Business Units: The Cabinet Member (Public Protection and Rural Affairs) 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 was one potential growth item which related to the recruitment of a part-time Licensing Enforcement Officer within the Public Protection Business Unit. Major variations in relation to Bereavement and Markets included £20,000 for the pay award and new management arrangements, £18,000 for improved Waste Management, £9,000 for markets refuse, £7,000 for footpath repairs, £72,000 for movement in appropriation to Business Reserves and £75,000 for building management/business support and central transport and increased utility costs of £3,000 and increased income of £123,000 expected. The Public Protection budget incorporated £14,000 for the pay award and £16,000 income through increased gambling act fees. The Cabinet Member then detailed the efficiency savings which related to £16,000 cash savings for improved market operation and £6,000 cash savings in relation to Public Protection. Bereavement Services fees and charges had generally been increased by 5%, Public Protection by 4% and there had been no increase in Hackney Carriage fees. The main risks to the budget areas related to the loss of income and difficulties in replacing front line staff.

Questions were then invited. One Member queried what the £6,000 cash savings consisted of. The Cabinet Member advised that these savings related to reduced expenditure for items such as car allowances, insurance and overtime. In response to a query concerning the improved market operations which resulted in a £16,000 cash efficiency saving, the Cabinet Member reported that this had been due to improved management arrangements, improved recycling and an increase in fees. There was a discussion regarding the number of dog wardens and the practical nature of the work. It was confirmed that the mercury abatement work was completed and that there was an outstanding bill for £7,000 that was being queried. The cost of cremations and the anticipated efficiency savings were considered and it was also confirmed that entry into the Crematorium Awards of Great Britain would be considered.

Members agreed the budget.

(Six Members voted for the motion and there were four abstentions)

(5.33 pm - 5.50 pm)

59/07 (2) - **Bereavement and Markets Business Unit:** Please see Minute 59/07 (1) above for the preamble for the joint report on this item and it was **agreed** that this budget was accepted.

(Six Members voted for the motion and there were four abstentions)

(5.33 pm - 5.50 pm)

59/07 (3) - **Environment and Department of Community Services Business Support Business Units:** The Cabinet Member (Environment) was

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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 two potential growth items which were £107,000 towards the recycling expansion programme and £90,000 (one off) for project planning costs relating to the implementation of wheelie bins. Major variances included increases in fuel costs, extension of the kerbside recycling scheme and fleet management costs. There was increased income from sales of recyclables and recyclable credits and there were also reductions in handling fees for recyclables. Cash efficiency savings included £14,150 for the reduced cost of gate fees for recycling materials, £1,530 for the reduced cost of managing abandoned vehicles and £13,320 for increased income from the sale of recyclable materials. Fees and charges were to be increased by 4% or more (rounded to the nearest 50p) and trade waste charges had been increased by 10% to cover increased disposal costs and landfill tax.

In relation to the DCS Business Support business unit there were no major variances to the budget and no growth items. Cash efficiency savings of £4,000 had been identified.

Questions were then invited. In response to a question over the growth bid for the expansion of the recycling scheme, the Cabinet Member advised that this was to expand the scheme to those currently not covered in the district and it was noted that some caravan parks would also be covered. He also confirmed that there would be weekly collections of food waste. In relation to the recycling of card, the Acting Head of Environment advised of the Yellow Woods Challenge, a successful scheme run with local schools, to recycle yellow pages. She added that the issue of recycling plastics was currently being discussed through the Waste Partnership and, in particular, the issue of encouraging local supermarkets to reduce the amount of plastic waste they produced through their products and reference was also made to the Courtauld Agreement scheme which aimed to reduce packaging waste growth and identify ways to reduce food waste produced. The £90,000 for the planning costs for the implementation of wheelie bins was also discussed.

The issue of energy consumption through the installation of heat pumps at Council buildings was discussed and it was noted that nine heat pumps had been installed to Council properties and 34 were to be installed in the forthcoming financial year and the Council would be ready to bid for any available future funding.

Members agreed the budget.

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

(6.32 pm - 7.00 pm)

59/07 (4) - **DCS Business Support Business Unit:** Please see Minute 59/07 (3) above for the preamble for the joint report on this item and it was agreed that this budget was accepted.

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

(6.32 pm - 7.00 pm)

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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

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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)

59/07 (6) - **DDS Business Support Business Unit:** Please see Minute 59/07 (5) for the preamble for the joint report on this item and it was agreed that this budget was accepted.

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

(5.50 pm - 6.32 pm)

59/07 (7) - **Planning Business Units:** Please see Minute 59/07 (5) for the preamble for the joint report on this item and it was agreed that this budget was accepted.

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

(5.50 pm - 6.32 pm)

60/07 - **FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS:** The Commission considered the key decisions which fell within its remit.

(7.00 pm)

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SCRUTINY MATTERS AND REVIEWS UNDERTAKEN BY THE COMMISSION

61/07 - **UPDATE ON PLANNING SERVICE PEER REVIEW:** Further to Minute 09/07, the Head of Planning Services submitted a written report which updated Members on the work undertaken to date and future work planned on the areas for improvement arising from the Planning Peer Review. The key recommendations from the review and updates on each recommendation were attached to the report as Appendix A.

A brief discussion on a number of the recommendations ensued and the Head of Planning Services responded to questions relating to Parish Councils and their involvement in the planning process.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that an overview report concerning the review would be submitted to the next meeting.

Members unanimously accepted the report and endorsed the recommendations as detailed in Appendix A.

(7.00 pm - 7.23 pm)

62/07 - **REQUESTS FOR INCLUSION OF ITEMS IN FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME:** There were none.

(7.23 pm)