

Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

6th January 2011



Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
J. Baugh	Apologies	A. M. Meyer	Apologies
G. Cohen	Yes	R. Ramage	Yes
M. Dunn	Yes	D. E. A. Rice	Apologies
Dr. R. L. Evans	Yes	A. F. Shelton	Yes
M. Gage (Chairman)	Yes	Mrs. J. Smith	Apologies
J. E. B. Gyford	Yes	F. Swallow	Apologies

Apologies were also received from: Cllr. N. Harley, Portfolio Holder for Enterprise and Culture; Cllr. R. Mitchell, Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment and Sustainability

The following Members were also in attendance for item 4 regarding budget scrutiny.

Cllr. G. Butland, Leader of the Council

Cllrs. N. McCrea and T. Wilkinson, Deputy Portfolio Holders for Enterprise and Culture

Cllr. Lady Patricia Newton, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Well-Being

Cllr. Mrs. G. Spray, Deputy Cabinet Member for Housing and Well-Being

Cllr. R. Walters, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability

Officers in attendance: Mr. C. Fleetham, Corporate Director

Mr. J. Hayden, Sustainable Development Director

Mrs. C. Dean, Head of Community Services

Mr. P. Partridge, Head of Operations

50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr. R. Walters declared three personal interests in relation to item 4 of the agenda as follows:-

- He was a Trustee of the Braintree Museum;
- He was a Director of BEAU;
- He was a member of the Fire Authority.

He remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion.

51. QUESTION TIME

There were no questions asked or statements made.

52. BUDGET SCRUTINY

Cllr. Gage welcomed Members and Officers to this budget scrutiny session with the second group of Cabinet Portfolio Holders.

He reminded the Committee that the purpose of the session was to ask supplementary questions of the following Cabinet Portfolio Holders (and/or their deputies):-

Cllrs. N. McCrea and T. Wilkinson, Deputy Portfolio Holders for Enterprise and Culture (on behalf of Cllr. Harley who was away);

Cllr. Lady Patricia Newton, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Well-Being;

Cllr. R. Walters, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability

The Committee had before it the written responses provided by the Portfolio Holders to the following set questions:-

(1) Can you explain how you developed your budget for 2011/12 taking into account corporate priorities and the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2008/09 to 2011/12?

(2) With the current climate, what efficiency savings have you put in place and what effect will they have on services etc.?

(3) How have you taken decisions about which services are considered priorities and which are not?

(4) Are there any proposed changes to the budget for service areas and, if so, what are their implications for service users, with particular emphasis on potential areas for budgetary cuts?

Cllr. Gage also drew the Committee's attention to the fact that the written responses had been compiled prior to receipt of the notification of the Government's grant, and that Members would need to bear this in mind when asking supplementary questions.

The Committee also had before them a copy of the update of the Medium Term Financial Strategy that was considered at the Cabinet meeting on 7/12/10.

Cllrs. N. McCrea and T. Wilkinson, Deputy Portfolio Holders for Enterprise and Culture

Supplementary questions asked by members of the Committee covered the following issues:

- The proposed creation of a charitable trust to run the Braintree Museum and other facilities, and the amount of any possible savings that could be reinvested in the trust;
- The intention to extend the charges for pre-planning advice.

Cllr. McCrea clarified the wording of the written answer that related to this issue, and set out below is the position following further advice.

The intention is to ensure that the charges that the Council makes for pre-planning advice cover the Council's costs. In one particular area - advice on listed buildings - the Council currently pays £50,000 per annum to the Essex County Council for a range of specialist advice which includes advice on historic buildings and conservation areas. The District Council's budget in this respect is being halved and options are currently being investigated including re-negotiating the terms of the Service Level Agreement with the County Council or employing a Conservation Officer. Advice to applicants on listed buildings is currently

provided free of charge, but the intention is that such advice will be charged for in future;

- The current support provided to Warner Archive Trust and the intention to reduce those costs to nil by 2014;
 - The need to ensure the merger of Business Development Services (BDS) with Braintree Enterprise Acorn Units organisation (BEAU);
 - The moving of an Administrative Assistant from Development Control to Land Charges.
- Cllr. McCrea clarified that the written answer that related to this issue inadvertently indicated that the efficiency saving in the first year was £33,000 when it was in fact £3,000;*
- The implications of decreasing the speed at which planning applications are dealt with and the associated customer impact;
 - The number of posts in the Planning Department that will be deleted.

Cllr. Lady Patricia Newton, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Well-Being

Supplementary questions asked by members of the Committee covered the following issues:

- How savings will be achieved in phasing out the walking programme (Heart and Sole, and Walking for Well-Being)

As this is somewhat complex, the Portfolio's Holder's answer is summarised below.

Phasing out the walking programme will achieve savings of £11,424.15 as follows:-

Heart and Sole – Annual Costs - £20,224

Net Costs after deducting external funding £10,676.00

*(Costs include Printing and Postages/Health and Safety/
Equipment/Training/Travel Expenses and specific staffing costs of:
Community Well Being Development Officer (1.5 days per week
of p/t G3 post – £9,616)*

Health Walk Co-ordinator (95% including 18% on costs - £4035.60))

Walking for Well Being – Annual Costs -

£748.15

*(Includes Travel Expenses/Printing and Postages and specific
Staffing costs of:*

Health Walk Co-ordinator – 5% incl. 18% on costs - £212.40)

Total £11,424.15

In addition to the above costs, £545 was spent in 2010/11 on one off initiatives which benefited users and volunteers for both Heart and Sole and Walking for Well Being.

- Progress on how services in connection with the Choice Based Lettings Scheme were being streamlined to achieve efficiency savings.

Action Point: Portfolio Holder to provide a figure for the current cost of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme;

- Whether people other than tenants can be helped by Greenfields Welfare Rights Officer;
- The review of the service level agreement with the Citizens Advice Bureau;
- Whether users have been advised of the phasing out of welfare rights advice in March 2011, and the availability of advice from other agencies;
- The ceasing of the service on 31/3/11 provided by Hanover at Home Service to elderly people who are owner/occupiers, concerning aids and adaptations, and whether there any plans to offer alternative facilities;
- The provision of a directory of advice showing where persons are able to seek advice on

welfare rights, benefits rights etc. (and which Cllrs. Would equally find useful in signposting constituents);

- Progress with Witham Swimming Pool;
- Preparations for retendering the Leisure Management contract when it expires next year.

Cllr. R. Walters, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability

Supplementary questions asked by members of the Committee covered the following issues:

- In relation to Operations, whether savings anticipated through market testing/sharing services etc. can be achieved;
- The savings achieved as a result of re-negotiating the gate fee paid for processing 'dry' recyclable material;
- Review of Pay and Display Parking Charges – how this has effected the number of persons actually utilising the car parks.

Action Point: Portfolio Holder to provide details of the number of pay and display tickets issued prior to and after the review;

- Whether there are any cash savings arising from reducing the residual waste to landfill;
- The impact of not including the recent VAT rise in Pay and Display car parking charges pending the next car parking charges review in 2012;
- As regards the proposed wind turbine at the Discovery Centre, the likelihood of whether the current generous 'feed in' tariffs are going to be in existence for a long enough time, and why the project will take two years to commission;
- Clarification of the 'new' element of the New Weekly Food Collection Service;
- The reporting timescale for the review of the service delivery and staffing levels within Health and Safety, Emergency Planning and Flood Management.

At the end of the budget scrutiny session, Cllr. Gage thanked the Leader and the Portfolio Holders, Cabinet Deputies and Officers for their contributions and for answering the Committee's supplementary questions. In particular, the written answers provided by Portfolio Holders had been very full and comprehensive.

Similar to the previous night's budget scrutiny session there was a general consensus amongst the Committee that the submission of written answers to the set questions worked well and facilitated a better structured scrutiny of the Cabinet's budget proposals.

53. FINAL BUDGET SCRUTINY SESSION

The Committee was advised that an additional meeting of the Committee had been arranged for **Wednesday 9th February 2011 at 7.15pm at Causeway House** to facilitate a final budget scrutiny session which will be attended by the Leader. Members will have before them all the papers that are to be considered at the Cabinet meeting on 14th February 2011 when it formulates its final budget proposals.

DECISION: that the date of the meeting be noted.

Action Point: Scrutiny Manager to write to all members of the Committee to formally notify them of the date, time and venue.

The meeting closed at 8.37pm.

M. Gage
Chairman