

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Extract from Minutes of 1st December 2015

Extract from the Unconfirmed Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 1st December 2015

AS.75 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2016/17 TO 2018/19

The Committee was requested to consider an update of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2016/17 to 2018/19 and to provide feedback to the Cabinet and Council as part of the Budget consultation process.

The Chief Finance Officer amplified aspects of the circulated report, which had been considered by the Cabinet at its Meeting on 19th November 2015. It had also been discussed at the recent Town/Parish Council Liaison Meetings, and would be subject to public consultation before being considered further by the Cabinet and the Council in February 2016. The Chief Finance Officer explained that the implications of the Chancellor's recent Autumn Statement, and the forthcoming local government settlement, would be fully assessed and included in the subsequent reports to the Cabinet and the Council. It was considered that a Special Meeting of this Committee should be convened prior to the Cabinet Meeting on 18th February 2016 so that the Committee could also consider the report and forward its comments thereon to the Cabinet and the Council.

In response to various questions from Members, it was reported that the Valuation Office would continue to deal with appeals in relation to business rates; an estimate of the impact of outstanding business rates appeals would be included in the updated report which would be considered by this Committee, the Cabinet and the Council in February 2016; the Chief Finance Officer would draft a rationale for the long-term financial stability of the Council following her consideration of the impact of the Autumn Statement and the forthcoming local government settlement, and would meet the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group to discuss the proposed MTFS, in advance of its formal consideration; and the current assumption was that Council Tax could be increased by up to 2% across the life of the MTFS.

The Committee thanked the Chief Finance Officer for her report. It was suggested that future such reports should include a spreadsheet detailing the risks faced by the Council. It was noted that work was progressing in relation to the proposal for devolution across Gloucestershire, which could have financial implications for the Council, and that a Business Case in relation to the Counter Fraud proposals would be submitted to a future Meeting of the Committee. The Chief Finance Officer also undertook to update the Committee on the content of the consultation document, following its approval by the Leader of the Council.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/17 to 2018/19 be noted;**
- (b) a Special Meeting of the Committee be convened in late January/early February 2016 to consider the final budget proposals in advance of their consideration by the Cabinet and the Council.**

Record of Voting - for 7, against 0, abstentions 0, absent 0.

Note:

It was subsequently agreed that the Special Meeting referred to in Resolution (b) above would take place on Tuesday 9th February 2016 at 10.00 a.m.

Responses to consultation questions from website

There were 12 resident responses to the website consultation. The questions posed and responses are set out below:

The level of funding available from central government for 2016/17 is unclear at the moment. We may need to increase our share of the council tax by a maximum of 1.99%. This would increase council tax for a band D property to £128.91. What do you think about this level of increase in council tax?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Don't mind	Support	Strongly Support
1	1	2	7	1

The Council is proposing to freeze parking charges for 2016/17. What are your views on this proposal?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Don't mind	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	2	3	4

The Council is proposing to freeze garden waste collection fees for 2016/17. What are your views on this proposal?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0	1	2	5	4

The Council is planning to make savings by continuing to expand its shared services arrangements with its partner councils (West Oxfordshire District, Cheltenham Borough and Forest of Dean District Councils). By delivering savings in this way, the Council is able to protect services for local people. What do you think of this approach?

Agree	12
Disagree	0

The Council is not proposing to make any changes to standards in front line services for 2015/16. Do you agree or disagree with this?

Agree

Disagree

Q7: The Council is not proposing to make any changes to grants to the voluntary sector for 2016/17. Do you agree or disagree with this?

Agree

Disagree

Narrative Feedback from Website Consultation (Responses have been paraphrased)

1 comment that the start-up membership prices set up by SLM for the Council's leisure facilities may be too expensive; and local residents may not be able to afford to use them. Further observation: that the gyms are being "kitted out" at the tax-payer's expense, and are therefore already subsidised with public money.

2 comments that the council should review the grants awarded.

1 comment that the Council should release the money being held for a rainy day.

1 comment that the priority should be to maintain all "essential" services, with zero budget increases. Keep services necessary to maintain a reasonable basic standard of living for the community.

1 comment to review all positions within the authority with a view to sustain, scrap or amalgamate with other roles.

1 comment that car parking charges are too high, especially for short stays.

1 request for all car parking machines to give change.

1 comment that Council Tax should be used sensibly and fairly to deliver services that are fit for purpose. Further comment that Council employees, contractors and suppliers should be treated fairly, equitably and well, senior staff should be fairly but not disproportionately rewarded. To provide high quality services at the lowest possible cost to council tax payers

(END)