

**EXTRACT FROM THE DRAFT MINUTES OF ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SAFETY
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 25 JANUARY 2011**

Present: Councillors Morgan (Chairman); Janio (Deputy Chairman), Davis, A Norman, West and Older

PART ONE

37. SCRUTINY OF BUDGET PROPOSALS

37.1 The Head of Planning and Public Protection introduced the report on Budget Proposals for the Environment Directorate.

37.2 The Strategic Director Place and Strategic Director Communities were present with other senior officers to discuss their areas of work and reply to Members' questions. The officers included Lead Commissioner City Regulation and Infrastructure, the Commissioner Community Safety; Head of Environmental Health and Licensing; Head of City Infrastructure and the Head of Financial Services, Environment.

37.3 The Strategic Director Place told the meeting that during the year there had already been preparations for a fall in income across the Council. There had been loss of grant or reduced income in Community Safety, Parking Services and Development Planning. There was still uncertainty around Local Authorities' grant settlements.

37.4 The Head of Planning and Public Protection said the some of the changes made in last year's budget needed time to establish. Therefore for 2011/2012 only limited savings in CityClean waste collection service and little change to parking charges were being proposed.

37.5 These proposals were based on work done earlier in the financial year and further work was needed. The report showed around £2.27 million savings were needed to be found, which would be a challenge for Environment.

37.6 The overall aim for Environment was to achieve saving of 7% in each of the service areas. This broadly would be achieved under these proposals, including for example renegotiating parking enforcement contracts, reducing the use of consultants and making better use of car parks.

37.7 Members asked for a clearer description of the table of budget proposals summary at the end of Appendix 2 and questioned whether there was enough up to date information in the report to enable meaningful scrutiny of the proposals.

37.8 The meeting heard that the Heads of Service had outlined their budget savings, based on the report that was considered by 9 December Cabinet. More savings and increased income were being sought; officers could highlight directions of travel.

37.9 The Head of City Infrastructure told the meeting that relatively small savings this year by CityClean would be achieved by vacancy management, the introduction of new street

sweepers and changes to the 'In Bloom' competition arrangements. There were no significant changes planned for the waste or recycling collection services; recycling was constrained at present by the materials that the materials recycling facility can receive. Costs of diesel had risen and there were changes to where 'red' diesel can be used.

37.10 Replying to questions the Lead Commissioner City Regulation and Infrastructure told the meeting that the Council was working with the Car Club owners on charging for parking bays and expanding into other areas of the City.

37.11 There was new government guidance on concessionary bus fares and this area now formed part of the corporate critical budget. Officers were working with corporate finance and the bus operators, he said.

37.12 The Strategic Director Communities said there was considerable uncertainty about the overall level of Community Safety funding for the City. This presented significant challenges especially as the Community Safety services are delivered in partnership with other organisations whose budgets are not synchronised with the Council's budget timetable. However the close working relations in the Community Safety Partnership was an advantage.

37.13 A key budget management principle was to minimise the impact of changes on the community and voluntary sector. At this time when all the Council's work is being reviewed, ways were being considered to link up Community and Equality areas of work.

37.14 The Commissioner for Community Safety explained that the £347,000 savings identified thus far would result from changing working arrangements without impacting on service delivery. It was proposed to look at four teams and to re-prioritise work in the Drug and Alcohol Action Team. It was planned to merge the Environment Improvement Team with the Communities Against Drugs Team and to combine the Hate Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Teams. One or possibly two vacant posts may be held but there would be no reduction in frontline services including casework services to communities.

37.15 Criteria had been agreed in partnership and early intervention would be prioritised. Some savings had been jointly agreed, with the police and probation service taking into their mainstream budgets up to 12 posts previously funded from pooled budgets.

37.16 Restructuring and better focussing on priorities would result in better outcomes; for instance in more support for Local Action Teams and for minority groups. Benefits would also accrue from co-location of services.

37.17 The Strategic Director Communities emphasised that parts of the Government settlement were particularly complex and that following the relevant budget lines was a challenge. For example former Home Office community safety grants would now transfer to Children and Young Peoples' Trusts.

37.18 Removal of ring-fencing from Government grants meant more flexibility and also more complexity. Next year's budget proposals would be based on the new Council structure.

37.19 The Head of Planning and Public Protection outlined the measures to help offset the significant loss of the Planning Delivery Grant.

37.20 He reassured Members that all the proposed savings in each area were based on the principle of avoiding impacting on frontline services, customers and stakeholders. Asked about the report's references to reductions in staff, he stated that every effort was being made to avoid redundancies. However some aspects of the reduction in grant funding still needed to be resolved.

37.21 The Committee heard answers to further questions on investment in car parks, parking tariffs for penalty charge notices (PCNs) and the number of parking enforcement officers. The £230,000 'Director' budget line in the adjusted Base Budget 2010/2011 would not appear under the new council structure. The impact of inflation would be absorbed during the year and at this stage, was not expected to be high.

37.22 Members expressed support for the maintenance of car park equipment in-house.

37.23 The Chairman felt it would be helpful to include a report on measures to encourage the use of car club vehicles, on the scrutiny work programme for next year.

37.24 He thanked the officers for providing information to the Committee.

37.25 RESOLVED; that the comments from this comment be forwarded to the 1 February Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting to be incorporated into a single scrutiny response to the budget.

