

Overview, Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee

4 January 2016

Present: Councillor S Graham (Chair)
Councillors B Burdis, S Day, P Earley,
M Hall, Janet Hunter, N Huscroft, C Johnson,
P McIntyre, J O'Shea and M Rankin

School Governor Representatives
Mrs J Little
Mrs M Ord

Church Representatives
Rev Vine
Mr G O'Hanlon

Others in attendance
Councillors J Wallace

OV41/01/16 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J Allan and A Austin.

OV042/01/16 Substitute Members

Pursuant to the Council's constitution the appointment of the following substitute Members was reported:-

Councillor J Wallace for Councillor A Austin

OV43/01/16 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest reported.

OV044/01/16 Minutes

Resolved that the minute of the meetings held on 7 December 2015 be confirmed.

OV45/01/16 Budget sub-group report

At its previous meeting on the 7 December 2015 the Committee was informed that a Budget Sub-group had been established that would carry out an in depth scrutiny of Cabinets budget proposals.

The Budget Sub-group met on 14 December, where the Deputy Mayor, Head of Finance and Heads of service presented the 2016/19 Business Cases for:

- a. Creating a Brighter Future – Savings
- b. Budget and Financial Plan – Growth
- c. Housing Revenue Account
- d. Investment Plan

The proposals had been developed with the expectation for continuing reductions in Central Government funding and rising cost pressures from the increasing demand for services.

The proposals scrutinised were based on a set of assumptions regarding grant reductions as the full impact of the spending review still remained uncertain. The assumption of a 2% increase in council Tax to fund Social Care was also included.

With regards to the Housing Revenue Account, assumptions had been made for a 1% rent reduction over the next four years, with the understanding that the full impact of the governments summer budget announcements still remained unclear due to the Welfare reform Bill and the Housing and Planning Bill were still making their way through legislative changes.

The budget proposals were aimed to continue to deliver the priorities of the Our North Tyneside Plan and the Creating a Brighter future change programme.

Taking into account the uncertainties the sub-group made 7 recommendations to be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration.

Following the receipt and evaluation of the settlement there would be further scrutiny in the impact and further recommendations may be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration.

Agreed that (1) the Budget Sub-Group report and recommendations (listed) be referred to Cabinet:-

R 1: With the overall forecast for long term borrowing rates to increase over the next few years, consideration should be given to weighing the short term advantage of internal borrowing against the potential long term costs. There is a risk for missing taking loans at long term rates which will be higher in future years.

R 2: It recognised that risks could be mitigated by ensuring all systems were in place and working to what is expected. It is critical that risk assessments are undertaken prior to implementing any staffing changes.

R 3: Consideration should be made to provide a training package to all staff and be available to citizens in Customer Service Centres.

R 4: There is need to be aware of the settlement from Government when the Authority receives it and any further proposals that may be made upon receipt of the settlement.

R 5: Scrutiny understood that one of the biggest challenges is the collection of rent and arrears. The Authority should strive to ensure that all data systems are in place to support this and to help tenants to pay their rents with encouragement to set up direct debits.

R 6: Scrutiny believes it would be beneficial that the level of reserves held by North Tyneside should be transparent to its citizens. Therefore this should be highlighted in future engagement.

R 7: Scrutiny believes that a preferred solution be decided upon for the Depot Rationalisation at the earliest opportunity.

OV46/01/16 Cycling Strategy Sub-group report – Cabinet Response

The Committee received the response from Cabinet to the recommendations submitted by the sub group of the Environment Skills Sub Committee in relation to its work on North Tyneside Cycling Strategy.

Appended to the report were details to the actions to be taken for each of the sub groups recommendations.

Agreed that the recommendation responses from Cabinet in relation to the work of the Cycling Strategy Sub-group be noted.