

Minutes of the meeting of General scrutiny committee held at Online meeting on Friday 15 January 2021 at 11.00 am

Present: Councillor Jonathan Lester (chairperson)
Councillor Tracy Bowes (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Barry Durkin, Jennie Hewitt, Bob Matthews, Louis Stark and
William Wilding

In attendance: Councillors Gemma Davies (Cabinet Member), Carole Gandy, John Harrington (Cabinet Member), Liz Harvey (Cabinet Member), David Hitchiner (Cabinet Member), Felicity Norman and Elissa Swinglehurst

Officers: C Baird – Director for Children and Families, R Ball – Director for Economy and Place, C Jenner – Assistant Director for Technical Services, M Lane – Acting Assistant Director Highways and Transport, A Lovegrove – Chief Finance Officer, K Morris – Strategic Capital Finance Manager, S Vickers - Director for Adults and Communities, and M Willimont – Assistant Director for Regulatory, Environment and Waste.

28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

29. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

None.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

31. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2020 be approved.

32. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None.

33. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

None.

34. 2021/22 BUDGET SETTING

The Committee was invited for its views on the budget proposals for 2021/ 22 both capital and revenue items, following the announcement of the provisional financial settlement.

The Chief Finance Officer presented the report, referencing the presentation slides at Appendix F to the report. He responded to two questions.

The Right Honourable Jesse Norman MP for Hereford and South Herefordshire who had been invited to attend by the Committee then spoke on the work he had been undertaking on behalf of his constituency and the County, his ministerial role and some of the broader current national issues. He then answered a number of questions from the Committee.

(Mr Bill Wiggin MP for North Herefordshire had also been invited to attend but had been unable to do so because of a prior commitment.)

The Director for Economy and Place commented on the work of the directorate, its priorities and the budget proposals. He drew attention to the key challenges and issues and proposed savings within the directorate as set out at appendix B to the report and one off funding for sustainable transport activity as referenced at paragraph 12 of the report. He also noted the capital funding requests relating to the directorate.

The Leader of the Council, and the Cabinet Member – finance and corporate services also commented on the proposals.

Councillor Gandy, Chairperson of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, and Councillor Swinglehurst, Chairperson of the Adults and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee commented on the recommendations from the two committees.

(The meeting adjourned between 12.35 pm and 12.50 pm.)

The Committee discussed the proposals asking a number of questions to which responses were given.

RESOLVED:

That:

(a) it be recommended to the executive that:

- 1. it be clarified in appendix C to the report that it is proposed to reduce opening hours of household waste recycling centres and not to close a centre;**
- 2. wording be clarified regarding savings on traded services to educational establishments to ensure that health and developmental interventions for young people are not affected by budget cuts;**
- 3. the budget priorities are re-visited to ensure that monies are found to enable our communities and our major infrastructure areas to be made more resilient to the expected bouts of extreme weather events, notably flooding;**
- 4. Cabinet review leaving car parking charges at present levels and seeking to raise this sum from the public realm budget through efficiency savings and value for money savings and from money raised by savings from corporate services;**
- 5. in light of the declaration of a climate and ecological emergency the cabinet should consider whether enough focus is being given within the budget proposals to developing green infrastructure;**

6. £1.2M of new homes bonus be used to progress sustainable transport measures at pace;
7. use of shire hall be reviewed to assess whether there are better options for the building's use and opportunities for better value for money from the building;
8. £800k for council tax discounts be reviewed to ensure that it is sufficient to meet need;
9. Cabinet progress exploring additional income from voluntary contributions and a local lottery;
10. it is noted that the Adults and Wellbeing Scrutiny committee will be further meeting on 26 January 2021 to consider revised savings proposals compared to those it considered at its meeting on 13th January. And it is further noted, that recommendations of that committee, in relation to any revised proposals, will be shared by way of correspondence to this committee and the Chairperson of the General Scrutiny Committee; and
11. mindful of the above, the following recommendations of the Adults and Wellbeing and Children and young People Scrutiny Committee be considered, as appropriate:

ADULTS AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The adults and wellbeing scrutiny committee recognises the extraordinary pressures for the council, and for the adults and communities directorate in particular, and acknowledges the significant work that has been undertaken and is ongoing in preparing the budget for 2021/22.

The committee recommends that:

1. A plain English narrative be prepared to explain the adult social care precept.
2. Clarifications be provided in subsequent budget meetings in terms of the reductions in the council tax base (paragraph 6), the money expected from central government (paragraph 7), how the measures identified in the Market Position Statement might help to address budget pressures (paragraph 8), and the level of public health grant (paragraph 10).
3. That the operational changes and proposals in terms of Learning Disability services, including the impacts on service users, be presented to the committee at the May 2021 meeting.
4. That opportunities be considered to inform service users about charging changes in advance and to stage increases incrementally.
5. That details of the alternative savings proposals for £330k be circulated to councillors as soon as possible, with a report presented to a future meeting of the committee.
6. That consideration be given to additional modelling around potential economic scenarios, including the cessation of the furlough scheme, and the consequential impacts such as the erosion of the

council tax base, reduction in other income streams, and on the delivery of services.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

That the committee:

- **Recognises improvements in the performance of the service and welcomes the additional funding to the base budget;**
 - **Queries the feasibility of the stretch target for the recruitment of foster carers in the 2021/22 and 2022/23 financial years and recommends to the executive that the target in those next two years is reconsidered;**
 - **Requests an update to a future meeting of the committee on funding available from government to address the mental health impacts of the pandemic on young people;**
 - **Requests that in future years the scrutiny committee Chairpersons are consulted over the detail required in the report to the committees; and**
 - **Acknowledges the efforts of members and officers in the work that has been undertaken to compile the budget for 2021/22.**
- (b) **in its review of Covid measures the Committee consider how grants have been used and seek comparative information from other authorities;**
- (c) **the committee makes arrangements to include monitoring of savings plans in work programme; and**
- (d) **mindful of the impact of the budget proposals on the Economy and Place Budget briefings be provided to the Committee on progress in achieving the proposed savings and their impact and the Committee be informed of other savings proposals that have been identified with a view to ensuring appropriate contingency plans are in place.**

35. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee deferred consideration of its work programme to its next meeting.

36. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 25 January 2021 at 2.00 pm.

The meeting ended at 3.17 pm

Chairperson