

Provisional Minutes of: POLICY DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 17th January 2006

**PRESENT: Councillor Sandiford (in the Chair)
Councillors Entwistle, Hancock, Lamb, McShea,
J Pawson, C Pilling, P Starkey, H Steen,
Doctor M Lee**

**IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Ormerod
Phil Seddon – Head of Financial Services
Linda Fisher – Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Elaine Newsome – Committee Services Manager**

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Alcroft, Graham and Ruddick

APOLOGIES: Councillors Disley (Lamb substituting), Huntbach and P Steen

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of Interest were made.

2. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

3. CONSULTATION ON THE COUNCIL'S BUDGET 2006/2007

The Head of Financial Services and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Risk Management gave a presentation on the proposed budget for 2006/07. Councillor Ormerod advised that this was the first time that the Council's Overview & Scrutiny function had been afforded the opportunity to consult on the budget, and as such, the views of the Committee would be welcomed and given further consideration as part of the consultation process.

Key areas for consideration were outlined as follows:

Waste Transfer, additional approximate costs of £260,000 because of the need to transport waste to Whinney Hill in Accrington, the cost of which would be absorbed by existing corporate resources;

Concessionary Fares, the provision of additional concessions would increase the cost to the Authority by £450,000;

The relevant costs for the Housing Stock Transfer process have been absorbed

The transfer of the Highways function to Lancashire County Council with a £100,000 cost saving implication;

Grant funding of £35,000 for Whitworth Civic Hall.

Councillor Ormerod further advised on the agreed Government allocation of a 4% increase in the Revenue Support Grant but that a savings target of £575,000 had been identified.

After giving consideration to the content of the report, Members raised questions and concerns on the following:

- Adequate reserve finances for contingency: the Head of Financial Services advised that there was an expected General Reserve amount of £600,000 and that the Council had access to further funding via the Change Management Reserve.
- Contact Centre costs and additional expenses expected to be incurred when the joint venture with Lancashire County Council proceeded. The Head of Financial Services advised that the resource allocation planned into the 2005/06 budget would be carried forward to finance this cost.
- Increase in burial charges: some concern was expressed over the increase in charges for burials. The Head of Financial Services advised that charges had not been increased for 2 years, and that the proposed fees were comparable with other authorities.

Member further expressed the following comments on the budget proposals

- Closure of the greenhouses: Member expressed concerns at this proposal and the impact on other user groups, and asked if the facility could be retained for an additional year in order to investigate alternative management arrangements. Councillor Ormerod advised that negotiations in respect of the closure were ongoing but would undertake to ascertain their current position.
- Priority funding: funding streams need to be monitored and modified to accommodate changing priorities as a result of achievement of targets
- The consultation process in respect of utilising Overview & Scrutiny Committee for consultation of future budgetary proposals: Members highlighted that the attendance of officers directly responsible for those areas identified as key budgetary issues would have been welcomed, as it would allow for a more in depth discussion and debate.

Some Members also expressed concern at the amount of consultation afforded to the proposals, and suggestions were received that, upon completion of the consultation process for the 2006/07 budget, a review should be undertaken and comparisons made with past initiatives of this kind.

The Chair advised the issues highlighted throughout the meeting would be brought to the attention of the Cabinet at its meeting on the 25th January 2006.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 7.35pm