

## **Extraordinary (Budget) Overview and Scrutiny Meeting 13 February 2012**

### **Response of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee received a summary of the amended budget proposals 2012-13 based on the decisions of Cabinet at its meeting on 8 February 2012.

The Committee noted Councillor Choudhury's apologies and his invitation to the Chair to meet informally to respond to any further questions.

#### **Funding for Proposed Alternative Options:**

Funding for Alternative Options (a) to (f) agreed by Cabinet is based on the resources identified by the Corporate Director, Resources. For details see the report of the Cabinet meeting (8<sup>th</sup> February 2012).

Peter Hayday, the Service Head, Financial Services, Risk and Accountability, explained the decisions made by Cabinet on 8 February.

There is a difference between the sum published for proposal (e) which is due to a rounding up of the sum for the delivery of ESOL classes; actual funding for this proposal was £245,000.

Further clarity was provided on proposal (f) as follows:

- £1.3 million from Area Based Grant reserves which are currently unallocated and could be used for other matters
- £100,000 from Partnership monies previously earmarked to fund redundancies but no longer required for this purpose.
- £280,000 of monies earmarked for employment initiatives in last year's budget which had yet to be allocated.
- £350,000 from a saving in the Authority's staffing budget resulting from the industrial action on 30 November 2011.

An update of the list of earmarked reserves at Appendix 6.3 "Projected Movement in Reserves March 2011 to March 2015" on p. 188 of the budget papers will be provided to the Committee.

#### *Committee's Areas of Enquiry:*

- Selected alternative options were identified by the Mayor and funding sources agreed through the Chief Executive.
- Earmarked Area Based Grant reserves - monies identified in the category of other corporate earmarked reserves listed at appendix 6.3 of the budget document pack 2012 – 13 (8<sup>th</sup> February) totalling £1.3 million are unused monies from the previous year. The original purpose of funds was not outlined in the budget proposal.

- Projected future reserves - sums shown at Appendix 6.3 of the Budget 2012/13 Document Pack (Cabinet 8 February) are indicative therefore the profile of the data will change as reserves are drawn down.
- The composition of the £151.8 million reserves at 31 March 2011 are published in the Council's final audited accounts and have been available since September 2011.

**Proposal to Fund 17 Police Officers for 3 Years:**

Collaborating with the Borough Commander, additional police officers have been secured. £1.485 million is to be allocated to fund 17 the officers over the next three years. They are subject to joint tasking by the Borough Commander and the Council's Community Safety Team and will focus on drug related crime, organised crime and antisocial behaviour.

*Committee's Areas of Enquiry:*

- The use of these additional officers will be covered by existing partnership arrangements. Through the existing biweekly joint tasking meetings with the Metropolitan Police the Council will have influence on how officers are deployed.
- The Partnership Taskforce is monitored on a fortnightly basis and presently comprises one inspector, two sergeants and thirteen constables. Five new constables will be added to this.
- The Taskforce is funded under the terms of the Section 92 agreement from July 2011 to July 2013.
- The Metropolitan Police is committed to maintaining the SNTs. The additional Police officers should enhance existing work.
- The Council and Police must consider how the additional resources will provide added value. By using the additional constables in specific areas or to deal with a particularly difficult problem, they could deliver more effective outcomes.
- A London policing plan has been prepared for the Olympics period. Local officers will be on duty and additional resources from across the country will also be deployed. In the period prior to the Olympics a programme of work will be developed to ensure the Council's enforcement officers will complement the work of the police.
- The Borough Commander has not indicated that the borough will be affected by any reduction in staffing levels.
- The Chair noted with concern that the additional police officers were partly being funded by £280,000 of monies earmarked for employment initiatives which are important for local residents.

### **Proposal for After-school Patrols & Victim Support:**

Andy Bamber, the Service Head, Safer Communities, had researched victim support and after-school patrol services available. In the past the after-school patrols had been resourced by the Communities Fund but this was being reviewed. The patrols dealt with incidents of after-school crime.

The alternative options proposal (d) (i) includes funding for two dedicated borough-based victim support officers for the next three years,

#### *Committee's Areas of Enquiry:*

- Whether other types victim support could be explored such as working jointly with RSLs to see if better value for money could be obtained

### **Proposal for Development of Energy Co-operative:**

Proposals had not yet fully been developed.

#### *Committee's Areas of Enquiry:*

- Whether many residents will benefit from the £30,000 allocated to support the development of an energy co-operative to help council tenants and residents in fuel poverty.

### **Committee's General Comments:**

The Committee finds that, upon enquiring, a number of the proposals are found not to be supported by definite plans which outline clearly an understanding of the potential benefits to residents. The Committee is concerned as to numbers of Police funded by the MPS, and those funded by the borough, and how they are tasked.

### **Chair's Comment**

I have issues about these amendments that are a major cause for concern, both to me and most of the Committee.

Firstly that we have convened another extraordinary meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee which is entirely due to the Mayor's decision to handle the Council's budget as he has. Not only did it not give the Committee time to understand what we were reviewing, but it also gave us a matter of days in which to meet, a restriction which did not allow all members or needed officers to attend. Councillor Choudhury could also not attend the meeting as a representative of the Mayor; a major failing given the importance of the budget.

The Mayor's decision to fund the police with £1.485 million in the next year is not supported by evidence of extra need.

Secondly, these changes have been delayed and appear to have been added as an afterthought, and will impact upon the borough substantially, especially

those in need of extra support.

Regarding the £245K taken from employment support for apprenticeships, training and graduate employment to ESOL there is no detail about how this had benefited residents in the past. No explanation or details were provided about how this money can now be used for this new proposal or as to why it was able to be now taken away from employment support.

£1.3 million of Area Based Grant, has now been found to be surplus and unallocated and part of a pot of money to fund the Police. Officers were unable to answer as to what this had been previously meant to fund.

£350K saved during the staff strike on 30<sup>th</sup> November last year, is also allocated now to a pot of money to support more Police for the borough.

£100K Partnership redundancy money is now found to be not needed, and allocated to these amendments.

£280K Employment Initiative support not allocated, now used for these amendments. No details as to why or how the money remains unallocated.

As I stated at the meeting, employment money has been re-allocated to fund the Police. This is a major decision, and should not be simply an add-on at the end of the budget process. The Mayor met with the Borough Commander in January regarding policing, leaving enough time to incorporate these changes in the main part of the budget which would have allowed time for proper review of these decisions. If this money is indeed found to be surplus, and able to be used elsewhere, there should be a full consideration of what would best benefit the borough's residents.

Cllr Ann Jackson  
Chair Overview & Scrutiny