

**Summary Comments on Mayor's initial 2013/14 Budget Proposals from
Councillor Ann Jackson (Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committee)
31st January 2013 11.24am**

AHWB

Public Health

The council may be in a very vulnerable position on future costs here, and would need to think long term as services being transferred may have extra hidden liabilities. The expectation that there may be room for savings may not materialise; too many back office savings in AHWB could result in not enough checks being made on new domiciliary and residential care contracts which could impact greatly on getting good outcomes here.

CSF

EMAN not being managed well, Members concern on exactly what we are doing with this is justified. Either the amount should be less and the unwanted over-budgeting directed elsewhere, or we should seek to encourage and guide more young people to take advantage of the scheme, which may need changing.

The governments new scheme for two year olds may produce pressure elsewhere on EYN making budgets hard to achieve, as staff are already stretched to accommodate current needs delivery and supervision.

Top-slicing the budget by 5% and putting forward 'vacancy management' as the means to achieve this; and thus putting further pressure on staffing that is already stretched beyond what it should be viewed as a bad decision by the committee.

D&R

There seems to be a large amount of previously undisclosed revenue in hand for Employment schemes, which suggests that we could have achieved greater results in past years than we did. Given the new methods being put in place to aid employment in the borough, we need to see more targets and outcomes being policed now. Overall, the new contracts do not seem to focus enough on this, and therefore do not make best use of the money on our residents' behalf. Forecast spend and outcomes for the council's employment and enterprise will need to be transparent and be fully monitored to ensure best benefits achieved for our residents.

We should not rush to dispose of assets to fill budgetary holes for this year only, as the need for future revenue needs to be considered; the Council needs to get best value out of disposals.

CE

Savings should have been found here, much money has been spent on Communications, Mayoral advisors and other expenses, which given the fact that we have cut back much third sector infrastructure spend this year seems

unjustifiable. Since writing these comments, CE has offered some further narrative on the current position, claiming both savings and growth have occurred. This should have been contained within the budget papers - as an explanation as to why no other saving were found in that Directorate. Given the current climate of austerity, we as a council have a duty to ensure fairness is observed when making savings and as such, all directorates should be open to reporting and discussion on budget issues. Scrutiny requests that these numbers be available for February's committee meeting. Further to this, no in depth discussion took place on CE as it was impossible for the committee to discuss a budget here, when none had been published. There was no point in discussing what 'might' be saved above what had nominally been mentioned in narrative only to the Committee.

CLC

Expectation here is of increasing cost for rubbish collection and disposal. Members keen to see more planning here to reduce production of rubbish - so as to avoid moving towards less collection by the borough; which given our density would be a mistake as regards the public's hopes. Policing needs will put pressure here, the Mets reductions may trigger extra cost for Borough / Theos' / overtime. Proposed Fire station closures may also lead to a need for extra policing on ASB arson.

Resources

Overall here, the issue is that of making proper arrangements for future expectation of government grant cuts. The deficit in the councils reserves in future needs to be addressed, especially given the fact that we are disposing of assets now, leaving no options to find funds in later years. That we could 'find' the needed deficit of many millions in back office savings is spurious, if we could do so, why have we not already done so and saved more vital front line jobs?

To continue to salt away money in 'earmarked' reserves which then is produced, as in the past year; for newly found Mayoral schemes or floundering services that should have been properly funded in any case is reckless; any money excess here should be in the budget.

Money set aside for Mayoral priorities needs to be fully budgeted and rationalised, and Mayoral spend on these questioned in the face of an increasing and deep deficit in council funds that has yet to have any plans put in place to remedy it.