

BUDGET COUNCIL MEETING: 26TH FEBRUARY 2014

Comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Mayor's revised budget proposals

In accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework, at an Extraordinary meeting held on 11th February 2014, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) considered the Mayor's revised proposals, agreed at the Cabinet Meeting on 5th February, for the General Fund 2014 – 2017. The updated proposals presented to OSC were included at Annex 5 of the Council Budget Pack.

Please find attached below the notes from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 February 2014 and the response of the Mayor.

4.1 General Fund Capital and Revenue Budgets and Medium Term Financial Plan 2014-2017 (Amendments)

The Committee considered the report titled 'General Fund Capital and Revenue Budgets and Medium Term Financial Plan 2014-2017' that had been presented to Cabinet on 5 February 2014 and also the two amendments proposed at this meeting. Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Cabinet Member for Resources, Chris Holme (Acting Corporate Director, Resources) and Robin Beattie (Service Head, Strategy & Resource, CLC) answered questions from the Committee.

Councillor Choudhury provided a summary presentation to the Committee; he reported that the revisions concerned funds identified for:

- GRO/CLC/01: Community Safety – Extension of PTF1 for 17 months, maintenance of PTF2 at current levels and addition of PTF3 involving provision of 20 additional Police Officers in the borough. He noted that the work of Officers secured under PTF1 and 2 had helped to deliver the Borough's community safety targets over the last three years.
- GRO/RES/01: An additional Council Tax reduction of £25 for residents who currently receive a partial Council Tax discount, including of elderly and disabled residents and those on low incomes.

The Chair invited Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members to discuss the revised proposals.

The Committee explored in depth the proposal GRO/CLC/01 raising the following issues to which Cllr Choudhury and relevant officer gave the following responses:

- Impact on the level of reserves: The Committee noted that these growth bids would require a reduction in reserves to the minimum level set by Council of £20million. They asked the S151 Officer to comment on this. *It was explained that the minimum level of reserves had been set by Council in 2013 when they agreed the Budget – under that Budget reserves would be reduced to £20million in 2015/16. Under this proposal, reserves would be kept at £20million into 2016/17.*

- Clarification on the additionally offered by the extension of PTF1 and creation of PTF3: *–It was explained that: 16 Police Officers were provided under PTF1 for the period 2012/13, 19 Officers were provided under PTF2 for the period 2014/15. PTF1 would be extended to end jointly with PTF2 on 30 September 2015. Under PTF3, 20 Officers would be provided for a 3 year period 2014/15-2017/18 under similar principles. Officers obtained under PTF3 would be additional to those deployed at present.*
- The timetable for recruitment of the new PTF3 officers: *The Committee was informed there are outstanding discussions with the Metropolitan Police concerning the timetable for recruitment however a provisional implementation date of October 2014 was being assumed at this point.*
- The distribution of the PTF3 officers in the borough and concerns that these resources should be deployed at the times when crime was most likely to occur: *The Committee was informed that it was expected that there would be one officer per ward and that these officers would be ring-fenced to work just on that ward level through an agreement with the Borough Commander which is currently being negotiated. It was also stated that officers would also contribute to borough-wide initiatives such as Dealer a Day.*

Members were keen to understand how the increase in number of officers funded by the Council through the PTFs relates to the number of officers in the borough funded by the Metropolitan Police. *Members were informed by the Lead Member Cllr Choudhury that information on officer numbers in the borough is not available.* A request was made for a material assurance that the additional Police resources would not be used to compensate for the reduction in officer numbers by the London Mayor.

- The Committee welcomed the proposal for additional officers but asked for an assurance that the officers would be deployed in each ward at times when the community needed their presence. *Cllr Choudhury and officers advised the Committee that the Executive was committed to ensuring that PTF3 officers work on local community safety priorities and that OSC would be informed as agreements are put in place about the deployment of these officers.*
- The Committee were keen to understand the comparative costs of funding Police Officers, PCSOs and THEOs – *It was explained that costs of Police Officers and THEOs were similar. Many urban local authorities took a mixed approach to the management of ASB supporting the local police in partnership whilst also maintaining a visible civil enforcement capability.*
- On whether SNT ward forums could be involved in the deployment of the additional officers - *Members were informed that high level discussions were presently being undertaken but the Council would consult with SNT Forums on operational matters*
- The Committee welcomed the proposal for additional officers but asked for an assurance that the officers would not be used to compensate for Met. Police reductions and would be deployed in each Ward at times when the community needed their presence. *Cllr Chuodhury and officers advised the Committee that the Executive was committed to*

these matters and that OSC would be informed of negotiation developments.

- The Committee noted that the opportunity to direct activities in PTF1 and 2 had been missed and asked for an assurance that this would be done for PTF3 – *the Committee was informed that priorities were agreed strategically across the Council, however policing was intelligence led. Agreements targeting police resource to local priorities formed the basis of both PTF1 and PTF2 agreements with anti-drug activity being a particular focus. It was confirmed that the Council would continue to pursue its local priorities and also undertake robust discussions concerning how the additional resource paid for by the Council would be used.*
- The Committee referred to an incident where a problem on an estate had not been resolved because of disputes between the Police, THEOS and the Housing Association about responsibility for the tackling the issue. A Member asked how better communication would be ensured between each of the agencies responsible for community safety – *It was explained that a multi agency approach was used for all issues to ensure that each carried out its duties via a plan for coordinated action between the agencies.*
- The Chair agreed to write to the Borough Commander to request further information on the number of police officers on the borough and how this has changed over recent years.

Members then considered the summary of changes to the budget report submitted to February Cabinet and noted the sum identified for the 'development of the New Civic Centre'. The following issues were raised:

- An explanation of the limited costs advised in the report was requested before the forthcoming Budget Council meeting giving as much information as possible.
- Members noted that exempt information made available to Members on this matter did not detail fully the alternative options considered before the selection of the recommended option.
- Additionally they wished to receive clear information on what capital assets are to be disposed.
- *Members were advised that the full budget report to be submitted to Budget Council incorporated an entry within the capital programme for development of a new civic centre, utilising £10m of "prudential borrowing". These were already factored into the medium term financial plan. The amendment proposed a further £1M from General Reserves as additional resources to support this development.*
- *The S151 Officer noted that once full costs of the development have been identified, it would be necessary to agree the amended capital programme and this was a matter for Full Council.*

Members lastly considered the proposed Council Tax Reduction Discount noting that residents in the borough were already able to apply for a discount of up to 100%.

- A Member asked how the reserve being used to fund this reduction would be replenished in the following year. - *It was explained that the*

reduction, which would apply to those in receipt of partial council tax reduction, would be funded as set out on page 3 of the supplementary agenda paper. The Committee was informed that the monies would be primarily offset through additional savings in 2015/16 and 2016/17. There could be a small cost element as the proposal may require some minor administrative and system changes.

At the end of the debate the Chair thanked Councillor Alibor Choudhury, Chris Holme, Robin Beattie and the other officers that had attended the meeting for their contributions.

Following the discussion, the Chair wished the Committee's concerns on some matters relating to the proposal for additional Police Officers as advised in the resolution of the response to be conveyed to the Executive Mayor and to Council as part of its budget response in order that these may be included as part of negotiations with the borough Commander and MOPAC:

He then **Moved** that the Committee note the budget amendments and asked officers to provide the information requested above.

All the above information was to be presented to Members before the budget Council meeting.

Resolved

1. That the report be noted.
2. That officers be requested to provide the information set out above to Members of the Committee in advance of the Budget Council meeting.
3. That the Chair write to the Borough Commander expressing the Committee's concerns around the control of the deployment of Police Officers purchased by the Council under PTF1,2 and 3 and request the Mayor to do the same.
4. That the following comments of the Committee be highlighted and circulated to the Executive Mayor and then on to Full Council as part of the budget setting meeting:
 - *It was important that in making this provision, the Council's funds were not being employed to compensate for the Mayor of London's cuts to the Police service*
 - *The Committee was disappointed that no data was available to enable the reduction in the numbers of Police Officers in the borough to be quantified and were of a view that information would enable to Council to understand if there was a transfer of expense from the GLA*
 - *Since the employment costs of THEOs was not dissimilar to those of Police Officers, the Committee was of a view that Council would be better recommended to purchase additional Police Officers who would be able to operate with full police powers which were not otherwise available to THEOs. This would better fulfil the wishes of residents for*

community safety throughout the borough as THEO activity was focussed towards ASB, markets and entertainment zones in the Borough.

- It was important that the Police Officers' duty timetables/rotas were planned around times of need to ensure that their leadership was available to the community at times when incidents were more likely to occur.

Response of the Mayor to the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Mayor thanks the Overview and Scrutiny Committee members for their contribution to the budget discussions and, in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules, has given consideration to the additional comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out above.

The Mayor confirms that, having given consideration to the points raised by the Committee, he has not made any further amendments to his budget proposals.

Tabled report prepared by: Service Head, Democratic Services, 26th
February 2014