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BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMISSION
HELD ON 13TH JANUARY 2014 AT 6 PM**

P Councillor Hopkins (in the Chair)
P Councillor Brain
P Councillor Emmett
A Councillor Khan
P Councillor Naysmith
P Councillor Watson
P Councillor Weston
P Councillor Wright

Also in attendance :

Councillor Gollop
Councillor Champion-Smith
Councillor Pickup

RC

**101.1/14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCES, SUBSTITUTIONS AND
INTRODUCTIONS**

Apologies were received from Councillor Khan, Councillor Jenny Smith substituted.

RC

102.1/14 PUBLIC FORUM

Two statements had been received and were taken into consideration by the Commission. (*A copy of the Public Forum submissions are held on the Minute Book*). Due to the budget implications of both statements it was agreed to refer them to the Cabinet meeting to be held on 16 January, 2014 for consideration.

RC

103.1/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

RC
104.1/14 WHIPPING

None declared.

RC
105.1/14 MINUTES – RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 6TH JANUARY 2014

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting of the Resources Scrutiny Commission held on 6th January 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

RC
106.1/14 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

None raised.

RC
107.1/14 WORK PROGRAMME

The Commission agreed to have an additional meeting to consider the proposed budget being submitted to Council on 18 February, 2014. The date agreed was 3 February, 2014 at 6 pm.

RESOLVED -

that, subject to the above, the Work Programme be noted.

RC
108.1/14 2014/15 BUDGET SCRUTINY

The Commission considered a report of the Interim Service Director, Finance (agenda item no. 8) considering the draft revenue budget proposals for 2014/15 to be submitted to Cabinet for approval on 16 January, 2014.

The Chair opened the debate on the proposals and during consideration of the report the following points were raised or considered –

- Members expressed concern that detailed information relating to individual directorates was not included in the draft report to Cabinet, which seriously curtailed effective scrutiny of the budget proposals. The Interim Service Director, Finance

explained that senior management would be completing the detail for Cabinet to consider on Thursday and that this information would be shared with scrutiny members as soon as possible;

- Reasons cited for the absence of detailed information related to the very limited timescale to coordinate the various inputs to finalising the budget proposals, ie, the Local Government Settlement and the Budget Consultation process;
- It was not possible to see what feedback from the consultation would be taken into account;
- It was not possible to analyse the effect of budget reductions and the effect they would have on staff numbers and service provision;
- Concern was expressed that during the consultation period the public might not have been fully aware of the alternatives relating to the proposed levels of Council Tax increases/freezing or that the £90m proposed budget reductions was not necessarily a definite figure as had been shown recently by the extra funds available from the Council Tax Collection Fund. It was felt by some members that this might have led to a different response. The Commission were advised that the situation was explained within the consultation document and that the £90m reduction assumption was correct during the consultation period;
- The consultation result showed that there was a preference from the public to increase council tax however some members of the Commission felt this was due to the lack of clarity in the consultation document;
- Following the changes to the budget proposals due to the Local Government Settlement, public response patterns had not significantly changed;
- Regarding the extra money from the Collection Fund some Members expressed concern that the potential for this was not brought to the Commissions attention at an earlier stage, however it was recognised that this had not been disclosed for reasons of prudence and that this information would not have influenced the final Council Tax base figure;
- The Collection Fund would be more closely tracked next year to enable early identification of its status and to assist the scrutiny process;
- The consultation response, although larger than was usually experienced, was too small to draw meaningful conclusions with regard to socioeconomic issues within the City;
- The Commission acknowledged that the budget proposals, the budget assumptions and the capital programme had been

scrutinised but reaffirmed that the detailed budget analysis by department was still awaited for review;

- The Interim Service Director, Finance said that the detailed budget information would be available either late Tuesday afternoon (14 January) or by Wednesday morning (15 January) and would show the revised proposals. The Commission welcomed this but expressed very serious concern that this could effectively allow only three hours for them and the public to make comment on the specific budget details if they were to meet the 12.00 deadline for public forum statements on the day before the Cabinet meeting on the 16 January;
- The Deputy Mayor emphasised that the need to factor consultation and equalities feedback into any amendments had both been major factors in there being no amended budget report available and that the intention had been to be more open and not to deliberately conceal information. It was confirmed that there would be proper engagement with the scrutiny process in future years;
- The Chair suggested that in the absence of detailed information for this meeting he would draft a letter and include members' comments once they had a chance to examine the detail and submit this to the Cabinet meeting on 16 January. This approach was fully supported by members of the Commission;
- Following a query from a member in relation to the Public Health budget the Interim Service Director, Finance stated that he was not aware of any non-payments to professional staff or that a recruitment freeze was in place.

RESOLVED -

(1) that, subject to the comments made, the report be noted;

(2) that the Chair draft a letter on behalf of the Commission, to include members' comments on the budget proposals once they had a chance to examine the details, and submit this to the Cabinet meeting on 16 January, 2014.

RC

109.1/14

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Friday, 24 January, 2014 at 9.30 am.

(The meeting ended at 8.10 pm)

CHAIR