

Cheltenham Borough Council

Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 4th November 2002

Revenue and Capital Budget 2003/04

Report of the Group Director (Social and Community)

1. Summary and recommendation

- 1.1 Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been invited by the Cabinet to contribute to the preparations for this year's budget round.

At its meeting on 3rd October, this committee divided into three sub-groups to examine the three portfolio budgets, and, as a result, identified a number of budget areas for more detailed investigation.

- 1.2 This report brings together additional detail on each of the identified budget areas for members to consider before making recommendations to the cabinet.

- 1.3 I recommend that members consider each of the budget areas before determining their recommendations to the cabinet.**

2. Public Protection

- 2.1 The sub-group identified the need for additional revenue expenditure on the air quality monitoring station of £9,000, and on additional kennelling of £8,000. The only potential saving identified was the withdrawal of the council's annual contribution towards the Gloucestershire Home Safety Check Scheme (£6,800); members will recall that when this suggestion was brought forward last year, there was a significant adverse reaction from the public and other agencies.

- 2.2 Details of each of these three areas are set out below:

- 2.2.1 Maintenance of data quality control and quality assurance to the air quality monitoring station - Value £9,000 ongoing.**

The council funded the establishment of an air quality monitoring station between 1996 to 1998 in the sum of £46,000 by way of supplementary credit approval. Data from the station informs the air quality review and assessment and the Local Transport Plan. The quarterly average nitrogen dioxide level measured at the station is also a corporate performance indicator.

The station contains a large amount of specialised equipment which needs regular service and maintenance by appropriately qualified and experienced contractors. Revenue savings have been made through a partnership arrangement between Cheltenham Borough Council and the equipment suppliers. However, the continued operation of the station requires a contribution from the council to the cost of the service agreement.

The current quality control and quality assurance contract runs until December 2002. A further contract is essential to ensure data reliability and data credibility, particularly as the historical data is available via the internet on Cheltenham Borough Council air quality web page.

The station and the partnership arrangement by which it has been provided is detailed in Cabinet Office Guidance as an example of best practice. There is a live website link from the Cabinet Office to the station. The station and our air quality monitoring activities also made a significant contribution to Beacon status for maintaining a quality environment.

2.2.2 Increased kennelling costs - Value £8,000 ongoing.

Securing adequate kennelling space for strays has presented problems and a joint exercise was undertaken with the other districts in Gloucestershire, together with the police, in an effort to resolve the problem. Invitations to tender were invited from interested parties. None were received. The only facility prepared to accept strays remains the Cheltenham Animal Shelter, the council's existing contractor. Due to a change in contractual terms with the shelter the division has entered into a partnership agreement with Gloucester, Stroud and Tewkesbury councils and the police. The agreement pools kennelling space between the agencies. It is anticipated that previous accommodation problems will be resolved by the agreement. There has been a budgetary implication in the current year which will have a knock-on effect into subsequent years.

Secure kennelling of stray dogs is a requirement of the council's statutory duty in this area. All other means of providing alternative accommodation have been exhausted.

2.2.3 Night-time economy - Value £15,000 per annum for two years.

As identified in the earlier reports to Cabinet and this committee, there is a need for closer liaison, together with overlapping policy, between planning and licensing committees.

In consultation with the Assistant Director, Built Environment, it has been concluded that joint bids of £15,000 should be submitted from each area (i.e. a total of £30,000 per annum for two years) to cover the costs of such policy development.

This is the first revenue bid resulting from the night time economy report. Others may follow in due course.

2.2.4 Air quality review and assessment - Value £15,000

The council completed its review and assessment of air quality in December 2000 to determine whether or not air quality management areas had to be designated to meet the targets set by the National Air Quality Strategy. The Council is required to revisit its review and assessment during 2003 to ascertain if its predictions that national targets will be achieved are still valid. As no resources have been identified for this purpose the bid relates to engaging outside consultants to undertake the work.

2.3 An additional one-off revenue cost of £15,000 for the review of Cheltenham's air quality strategy was also identified as a potential bid against the capital/one-off revenue pot for 2003/04. Details are set out below:

2.4 **Provision of help-points at three CCTV safe havens - Capital Bid £17,5000**

Resulting from the night time economy study report on 24th July, the cabinet agreed to the funding of help points at three CCTV safe havens in the town. These will provide direct contact with the CCTV controller for people who consider themselves at risk in potentially threatening situations.

2.5 **Potential savings**

Home Safety Check Scheme - Potential £6,800

The Home Safety Check Scheme is funded by the Gloucestershire District Councils, together with other agencies. The stated purpose of the home safety service is to give advice and practical support on all relevant aspects of domestic accident prevention. The contributory district authorities have, for some time, had concerns about the standard and level of service provided by the scheme. As a consequence efforts have been made to obtain a satisfactory service level agreement to specify exactly what is received for the contributions to the scheme. Despite concerted efforts no agreement has been reached. As a result funding continues in the absence of performance standards and tangible measurable outcomes. In such circumstances it is difficult to demonstrate objectively the benefits to the authority.

3. **Community Services**

- 3.1 The sub-group identified a saving of £1,000 from the demise of the Women's Forum and requested that £600 of this be used to equalise funding between the two neighbourhood projects. This has been actioned.

The need for additional expenditure to implement the provisions of the Homelessness Act 2002 was identified, although members were informed that a separate report would be presented to cabinet on 15th October on this subject.

Members also called for reports into the apparently high costs of administering the small grants fund, as well as a review of council policy on the use by outside groups of council-owned accommodation, with particular reference to 14 Royal Crescent and Sandford Park Offices.

- 3.2 Details of each of these areas are set out below:

3.2.1 **Homelessness Act 2002 - value £27,000 ongoing**

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local housing authorities to introduce six new priority housing categories, the first two being mandatory the remaining four after an assessment to establish vulnerability:

- A person aged 16 or 17 who is not a relevant child (under the terms of the Children Act) or a child in need to whom a local authority owes a duty under S.20 of the children Act 1989;
- A person under 21 who was (but is no longer) looked after, accommodated or fostered between the ages of 16 and 18 (except a person who is a relevant student);
- A person aged 21 or more who is vulnerable as a result of having been looked after, accommodated or fostered (except a person who is a relevant student);

- A person who is vulnerable as a result of having been a member of Her Majesty's regular naval, military or air forces;
- A person who is vulnerable as a result of having served a custodial sentence, having been committed for contempt of court or any other like offence or having been remanded in custody.
- A person who is vulnerable as a result of ceasing to occupy accommodation because of violence from another person or threats of violence from another person which are likely to be carried out.

The authority is also required to carry out a comprehensive needs/supply audit, an internal review of the allocations and lettings policy and procedure in light of required changes and a review of the operation of the common housing register. A new homelessness strategy is to be produced by July 2002.

Other key aims of the Act are to:

- further promote a multi agency strategic approach to tackling homelessness
- place a stronger duty on local housing authorities to accommodate people who are homeless by extending priority needs categories;
- give greater powers for local housing authorities to house non-priority homeless people;
- roll out the choice-based lettings approach.

Currently most housing advice is carried out on an agency basis under service level agreements. In the transitional period it is proposed to continue with this arrangement but there is an additional requirement under the Act for all persons requesting housing advice services to be given a full housing assessment. This additional function, together with the above workload, is labour intensive, requiring interview, recording, pointing and visiting, and will require additional resources.

The minimum identified resource need is for the employment of one additional homelessness officer at a cost of approximately £27,000.

3.2.2 **Small Grants Administration**

Historically Cheltenham has developed a somewhat bureaucratic system for administering small grants to outside bodies. It is proposed to rationalise the system and reduce administrative costs. It is proposed that all interested groups should complete a form of no more than two sides of A4 detailing the use to which they all put the grant, how this activity equates to Community Plan priorities and any plans for matched or joint funding for their project. Each grant will require an end of year performance assessment return against the stated aims of the project. If such a scheme is approved, successful applicants will receive a flat rate small grant of £500 or, in exceptional circumstances and enhanced grant of £1,000. No direct budget savings will flow from these changes, but better use of officer-time will enable other projects to be supported.

3.2.3 Use of CBC accommodation

Historically the council has enabled voluntary groups to access accommodation by either taking on head leases for private property and sub letting to groups or allowing groups to occupy council owned premises on discounted non-commercial rents. The council is no longer in a position to continue with these non-commercial arrangements, exacerbated by repair, maintenance and end of lease dilapidation costs. It is proposed that, at the earliest point in such current leases the council should withdraw from the head lease. Voluntary groups would be free to pick up these head leases but must fund them from within their own resources. (This process has already been implemented with Cheltenham Housing Aid Centre and is proposed for tenants of Sandford Park Centre.) If the council wishes to see voluntary groups in a position no-worse than under the current arrangements, then any potential savings would be cancelled out by an increase in annual grant-funding.

4. Health and Wellbeing

- 4.1 The sub-group queried the apparent disparity between council-funding of the Everyman Theatre and of the Playhouse Theatre. It was noted that the Funding External Bodies Working Group would be investigating this area as part of its ongoing workplan.

Members did, however, identify four further areas on which more detail would assist their deliberations. Specifically, members wished to know how the Massive summer programme could be managed following the redundancy of the previous responsible post-holder, what operating budget would be available for arts development, and what work-programme (and associated resource-requirements) would flow from the expansion of the council's involvement in Health Promotion and Lifelong Learning.

- 4.2 Details of each of these areas are set out below:

4.2.1 Massive

Having fully reviewed the Massive revenue cost centre, the Massive 2003 project will be delivered within a standstill budget.

4.2.2 Arts Development - value £10,000

An operational budget of £10,000 will be required to undertake the research and survey work necessary for the production of an arts development strategy and action plan. Funds will also be used to deliver community-based "hands on" arts projects aimed specifically at increasing participation and raising the profile of art at a local level.

4.2.3 Health Promotion - value £10,000

The formation of a health and well-being portfolio as part of the new structure is a statement from the council that it recognises the impact that its services have on people's physical, mental and emotional well being and that by looking strategically at health and learning it can add value to focused work of CBC divisions as well as working in partnership with other deliverers on these themes.

The council's response to the health agenda is still yet to be clearly established and will be one of the key areas of development within the new portfolio. The vision is to promote the health of people in Cheltenham to reduce the impact of ill health and increase people's sense of well being. The aims are to tackle health inequalities and enable healthy communities.

A budget of £10,000 is required to support the co-ordination and delivery of sustainable activities and opportunities, with proven physical and mental health benefit, as detailed within the Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Health Improvement Plan, and to meet the objectives arising from the community plan. The budget will act as seed or match funding to support specific initiatives which target health improvement priorities, as well as to help support some of the support costs of developing these areas of work.

Examples of which are as follows:

- Develop links between leisure and entertainment providers and the promotion of mental well-being
- Expand the 'health walks' network across the district
- Develop the promotion of 'health walks' in a variety of settings, including GP surgeries, libraries, community centres, care homes
- Explore the provision for exercise opportunities for ethnic minority groups (particularly women) at the new swimming pool
- Support the promotion of a range of exercise opportunities across all age ranges
- Develop existing referral schemes for exercise at leisure centres
- Extend referral schemes to include a variety of exercise/leisure/arts options
- Work with schools to establish breakfast clubs
- Support schools in the provision of healthy eating options, review of vending machines and supply of drinking water
- Encourage schools to consider alternative routes to school

£5,000 is contained within the 2002/3 budget, specifically for undertaking a mental health research project in response to the production of the Mental Health Strategy earlier this year. Although unlikely to be committed this year, the budget needs to be carried forward to next year in order to undertake this work in consultation with the Health Improvement Partnership.

4.2.4 Lifelong Learning - value £10,000

A budget of £10,000 is required to further develop Cheltenham As a Learning Town, as set out with the Learning Town Strategy. Projects will be co-ordinated and delivered in the areas of Access to Learning and Adult Learning Opportunities, through consultation with the Gloucestershire Learning Partnership and Connexions.

5. Summary

- 5.1 The table below sets out a summary of the information provided in paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 above.

Social and Community Revenue Budget 2003/4

	£	£
PUBLIC PROTECTION		
Air quality monitoring station	9,000	
Kennelling	8,000	
Home Safety check scheme	-6,800	10,200
COMMUNITY SERVICES		
Homelessness Act 2002	27,000	27,000
HEALTH AND WELLBEING		
Arts Development	10,000	
Health Promotion	10,000	
Lifelong Learning	10,000	<u>30,000</u>
TOTAL		67,200

Social and Community Capital and One-off Revenue Schemes 2003/04

	£	£
PUBLIC PROTECTION		
Night time economy (over two years)	30,000	
Air quality strategy review	15,000	
CCTV safe havens	17,500	
TOTAL		<u>62,500</u>

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 It was always likely that timescales would prevent Overview and Scrutiny Committees from playing a major role in this year's budget process. Nevertheless, the meeting on 3rd October served as a useful familiarisation process for members and officers alike, and the more detailed work set out in this report is a direct result of that meeting.
- 6.2 The work undertaken this year has, in effect, kick-started an approach to scrutiny which will probably show its true worth in twelve months time. However, by contributing to the cabinet's deliberations at this stage of which is sure to be a very difficult budget cycle, the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee have taken an important first step.

7. Implications

- 7.1 **Financial** As detailed in the report.
- 7.2 **Legal** None arising from the report.
- 7.3 **Personnel** As detailed in the report.
- 7.4 **Equal opportunities, social justice and anti-poverty** None arising from the report.
- 7.5 **Environmental** None arising from the report.

Background Papers -

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