

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE AND VALUE FOR MONEY
SELECT COMMITTEE
04/02/2020 at 6.00 pm



Present: Councillor Stretton (in the Chair)
Councillors Al-hamdani, Byrne, Hulme and Phythian

Also in Attendance:

Anne Ryans	Director of Finance
Mark Hardman	Constitutional Services
Kaidy McCann	Constitutional Services
Councillor Chris Gloster (item 8)	Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group and Shadow Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Resources
Mark Stenson (item 8)	Head of Corporate Governance
Helen Cairns (item 8)	Finance Service
Vickie Crewe (item 8)	Finance Service
Matt Drogan (item 9)	Head of Strategy and Performance

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LIBERAL DEMOCRATS BUDGET AMENDMENT PROPOSALS 2020/21

The Select Committee considered a report of the Head of Corporate Governance which outlined the Liberal Democrats' suggested amendments to the Administration's budget proposals for 2020/21. The report identified additional savings proposals totalling £1.621m in 2020/21 and £0.267m in 2021/22 which could be considered individually or collectively. There were also initial investments proposed that would be funded from the savings proposals and suggested amendments to the Capital Programme. The Committee was asked to note that the budget amendments presented could be categorised into three broad themes of tackling health deprivation, combatting climate change, and regeneration, based on Liberal Democrat priorities.

The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group and Shadow Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Resources, accompanied by the Head of Corporate Governance, presented the proposals and addressed the enquiries of the Select Committee. It was explained that the Liberal Democrats were aware of the scale of the financial challenge the Council was facing and the difficult choices needing to be made to ensure that a balanced budget could be presented to Council. The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group also commended the work of the Finance Team who had provided assistance with the preparation of the budget.

The Select Committee examined the saving, investment and Capital Programme proposals in detail. In introducing consideration by the Committee, the Chair acknowledged

comments of the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group that some previous Liberal Democrat proposals had been included in later Administration proposals and commented that there may be some proposals here which, while the Select Committee may not feel able to support at this time, might be considered worthy of suggesting that the Cabinet give some consideration to them going forward. In respect of the Committee's considerations, the Chair advised that the budget reduction proposals be considered first as these would be required to fund any alternate investment proposals that the Committee might wish to recommend to the Cabinet.

Liberal Democrat Alternative Budget Reduction Proposals

OPP-BR1-201 - Additional Vacancy Management factor to achieve greater efficiency including limiting the present use of agency staff and consultants (£0.500m)

The proposal sought to assist in reducing the number of agency staff and consultants used across the Council further by applying an Additional Vacancy Management factor of 1% to all Council mainstream employee budgets. It was noted that the Administration had reluctantly applied a 1.5% factor and the ability of Council staff to deliver at the higher vacancy factor was queried. For that reason the Select Committee was not minded to take forward this proposal.

OPP-BR1-202 - Increase the Flexible use of capital receipts by revising the transformation programme to focus on the Opposition's priority areas (£0.500m)

The proposal noted that the Administration had taken advantage of the allowed flexibilities to fund transformational expenditure through capital receipts and put forward extensions of that flexibility to focus on the priority areas of the main opposition group. A possible investment in respect of recycling was outlined. The Select Committee considered that the Administration had taken advantage of the flexibilities to a level they felt comfortable with and noted that the outlined investment scheme had potential implications that had not been considered. For the above reason, the Select Committee was not minded to take forward this proposal.

OPP-BR1-203 - Reduction in the amount of stationery purchased across the authority (£0.002m)

It was proposed that stationery be centralised in particular locations across the borough to ensure that better value for money through increased understanding of which items are required, volumes etc. The Committee considered that, for the small amount involved, there was no costing for implementation or consideration of upheaval that might be caused through introduction of the changed arrangements. For the above reason, the Select Committee was not minded to take forward this proposal.

OPP-BR1-204 - Reduce the number of meetings where refreshments are provided (£0.004m)

It was suggested that not all meetings currently provided with refreshments required them and a 10% reduction to the refreshment and hospitality mainstream budgets for 2020/21 and 2021/22 was proposed. The Select Committee considered that not all meetings were attended by just Members and Officers, that there was a reputational issue to consider, and that the current level of provision was probably right for an organisation the size of the Council. However, the Select Committee was minded to suggest that the Cabinet look at the level of provision going forward.

OPP-BR1-205 - Reduce travel budgets to ensure the most efficient method of transport is used for essential Council business (£0.005m)

The proposal sought to reduce travel expenditure by ensuring that Officers used the most efficient and cost effective method for necessary travel. It was further suggested that this proposal would assist in delivery of the Green Agenda and better use might be made of Skype and teleconferencing. The Select Committee noted that the travel details presented went up to March 2018 only, that the cheapest option might not necessarily be the greenest option, and that more research or up to date figures were needed to consider this proposal. For the above reason, the Select Committee was not minded to take forward this proposal.

OPP-BR1-206 - Review of car allowances as previously promised to reduce the amount paid as a lump sum to staff doing zero or minimal mileage (£0.037m)

It was proposed that a review of the posts which attract essential car user status be undertaken with the intention of removing the lump sum payment from posts where users routinely record zero or very few miles. It was noted to the Committee that many staff who did use cars regularly did not hold such status. In presenting the proposal, disappointment was expressed that this proposal had not been progressed despite this Committee giving its support at the Opposition Budget meeting in February 2019 and the Council accepting it at the Budget Meeting on 27th February 2019. The Chair confirmed that the previous agreements had been noted and that advice had been received such that the issue would be considered as part of a wider review of reward packages. The Select Committee was therefore minded to remind the Cabinet of the previous agreement of the Council to this proposal and to recommend it be considered as part of the wider review of reward packages.

OPP-BR1-207 - Reduce the subsidisation of Trade Union support provided by the Council following a reduction in membership (£0.038m)

It was proposed that the trade union subsidy provided by the Council be reduced following a consistent reduction in trade

union membership as evidenced by decreasing numbers of staff opting to pay membership through payroll. The Committee was further reminded of a report made to a recent Council meeting such that the Council workforce had reduced by one third since 2010. Two members of the Committee, having declared personal interests in this matter determined to abstain pending further consideration of the nature of their interest in this matter. The Select Committee was minded to forward this proposal to the Cabinet for consideration.

OPP-BR1-208 - Reduction in the General Training Budget agreed in 2018/19 to be made permanent (£0.150m)

It was proposed that a one-off reduction made in 2018/19 to the Council's general training budget be made permanent. The Select Committee noted that the organisation was currently experiencing great change for which staff needed appropriate support. For the above reason, the Select Committee was not minded to take forward this proposal.

OPP-BR1-209 - Reconsideration of Council priorities with regards to the Marketing and Communications Service (£0.275m)

The proposal considered there was further scope to reduce spend on the Communications and Research service beyond that considered by the Administration as part of its Design and Assurance work. It was noted that this proposal had been discussed previously and that the service supported the valuable means of communication with residents. For the above reason, the Select Committee was not minded to take forward this proposal.

OPP-BR1-210 - Utilise available digital platforms within Libraries to access newspapers and magazines rather than purchasing hardcopies (£0.010m)

It was proposed to reduce expenditure on hard copies of newspapers and magazines across the Library service as these are widely available on online platforms. The Select Committee considered that not all people had access to online publications and that there needed to be an assessment of the use of such material before taking this proposal forward. For the above reason, the Select Committee was not minded to take forward this proposal, but to recommend that Library staff undertake a review of the use made of the various newspapers and publications over the coming year and report back to this Committee.

OPP-BR1-211 - Increase income target with regard to Section 38 and Section 278 inspections within the Highways service (£0.100m)

It was proposed that, following consistent overachievement of the income target for the highways related inspections covered by Section 38 and Section 278 of the Highways Act 1980, the income target in this area by £0.100m for 2020/21. The Sub-

Committee noted that the income could go down as well as up due to being dependent on developments in the Borough. While there was a risk associated with this, the Select Committee was minded to suggest that the Cabinet give a consideration to this proposal.

In concluding consideration of the Liberal Democrat Budget Reduction proposals, the Chair noted that none had been recommended to the Cabinet for adoption as a confirmed saving meaning that additional funding for Liberal Democrat Investment Proposals had not been identified. Notwithstanding, the Chair invited the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group to introduce the proposals related to the Capital Programme and investments.

Liberal Democrat Alternative Capital Programme 2020/21 to 2024/25

A - New health centres in Shaw, Saddleworth and Chadderton to tackle the increasing health deprivation within the borough

It was proposed that the Administration's proposed allocation for a new healthcare centre, with Shaw being identified as the priority, be brought forward to 2021/22 and two additional healthcare centres in Saddleworth and Chadderton be also brought forward in 2022/23 and 2024/25 to deal with increasing health deprivation in the borough. The Select Committee noted that the proposed Capital Programme reflected the Administration's priorities for the forthcoming year and that further proposals would be forthcoming for future years. At this point, the Select Committee felt unable to recommend the proposals to the Cabinet but was minded to ask the Cabinet to investigate the feasibility of each of the additional proposed healthcare centres when considering the Capital Programme in a future year.

B – Expedite the work around Green Energy and invest in solutions to address Climate change and to ensure carbon neutrality

While the schemes being introduced by the Administration to tackle Climate Change were noted, it was suggested that more could be done and additional capital investments over the period to 2024/25 were proposed. The Select Committee noted the commitment of the Cabinet Member to this agenda and, while supportive of the agenda, queried the lack of specific proposals, particularly with regard to 2020/21. The Select Committee therefore felt unable to support this proposal at this time but considered that the Committee should invite the Cabinet Member and relevant Officers to report the Committee, advising on activities already underway and to explore future possibilities.

C - Provide a specific fund to remediate brownfield sites to make areas available for development and protect valuable green space

It was noted that while the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework aimed to make a focus on brownfield sites to help address the housing crisis in the region, a number of brownfield sites in Oldham that would be suitable for redevelopment cannot currently be used for building due to their condition. It was proposed to make additional capital investments to establish a specific fund within the capital programme for the period up to 2024/25 for the remediation of brownfield sites. The Select Committee noted that 'brownfield first' was the intent of the Council but that the government's house building targets and brownfield site remediation funding provision presented challenges. While it was acknowledged that this was an area which the Administration would wish to consider, the Select Committee felt unable to support this proposal at this time due to funding issues. However, the Select Committee did consider that the Committee should receive a report on issues around the extent of brownfield site availability for housing in the Borough to consider this proposal further.

D - Create a specific investment fund for the borough's footpaths and bring them up to standard

While there was a focus on road infrastructure, it was noted that there was still no specific fund to provide for footpaths which were the subject of many complaints to Members. It was also suggested that there may be insurance issues associated with the condition of footpaths. The Select Committee considered that it was unaware of the backlog of work in this area, noted that work was needed in other areas such as bridge maintenance, and that there was limited money available from which the Cabinet Member had to prioritise. The Select Committee therefore felt unable to support this proposal at this time, but considered that the Committee should receive a report presenting details of the Highways work programme, with a particular focus on where and how funding for footpaths is determined and whether there was sense in diverting more funding towards footpaths.

Liberal Democrat Investment Proposals

Provide a revenue fund to assist the Oldham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) work up detailed business cases for the proposed new health centres in Shaw, Saddleworth and Chadderton (£0.750m)

It was noted that this proposal fell following consideration of the associated Capital Programme proposal.

Reverse the Administration decision to reduce District Expenditure and continue investing in local priorities (£0.120m)

It was proposed that this funding be reinstated as it was considered the previous reduction had impacted on the valuable work that Councillors do alongside Ward residents. The Select Committee noted that this had been a previous conscious decision of the Administration and as such, with no savings in

support, it made little sense to recommend any change it at this time.



Oldham
Council

Reverse the Administration's reduction in Parish Council Grant funding (£0.015m)

It was proposed that a prior reduction of Parish Council Grant funding be reinstated, it being considered that they performed a vital role in acting on behalf of communities. The Select Committee noted that funding had been reduced previously in line with the government's funding of the Council.

Notwithstanding, and in further noting that no savings had been identified, the Select Committee was minded to recommend this proposal to the Cabinet.

Create a dedicated fund to replace and maintain signage across the borough and other road safety measures (£0.100m)

To continue improvements to road safety, it was proposed that a specific fund to replace and maintain signage across the borough be created. The Select Committee considered that where issues were identified then the available funding would be targeted. Comment was also made that Members needed to consider other sources of funding that might be available to support such schemes, including local funding opportunities.

Increase the investment in tackling environmental crime to combat issues such as fly tipping and dog fouling across the borough (£0.571m)

Believing that visible incidences of environmental crime such as fly tipping, littering and dog fouling create an environment that encourages further acts, it was proposed to increase the Administration's previous investment in tackling environmental crime. The Select Committee noted the proposal but, in the absence of funding, felt unable to recommend it to the Cabinet.

School Holiday Food Clubs (£0.050m)

Arising from concerns about food poverty, and particularly the impact of school holidays on the nutrition of children living in low income families, it was proposed that a specific investment be made to allow school holiday food clubs to run throughout Oldham. The Select Committee, while noting that the proposal was unfunded, was minded to ask the Cabinet to look at this issue and try to find funding to provide additional support to school holiday clubs.

Allocate a specific dedicated resource to fund the annual Saddleworth Band Contest (£0.015m)

Noting the popularity and reputation of the event, it was proposed that the annual Saddleworth Band Contest be funded centrally by Oldham Council under the Corporate Priorities budget as are town centre events. The current arrangement whereby funds were taken from area allowances of Saddleworth Councillors to fund this event was advised. On being advised that there might be insufficient funds in the Corporate Priorities

budget, the Select Committee considered that the Cabinet be asked to undertake a review of the budget to consider whether such funding could be identified.



Oldham
Council

RESOLVED that -

1. with regard to the Liberal Democrat Alternative Budget Reduction proposals -
 - a) this Committee suggests that the Cabinet give a consideration to the provision of refreshments at meetings going forward;
 - b) the Cabinet be reminded of the decision of the Council on 27th February 2019 to undertake a review of essential car user allowances and be recommended to consider this issue within the wider review of reward packages;
 - c) this Committee suggests that the Cabinet gives a consideration the reduction of the subsidisation of Trade Union support;
 - d) the Library Service undertake a review of the use made of the various newspapers and publications over the coming year and report further to this Committee;
 - e) this Committee suggests that the Cabinet give a consideration to increasing the income target with regard to Section 38 and Section 278 inspections within the Highways service;
2. with regard to the Liberal Democrat Alternative Capital Programme proposals -
 - a) the Cabinet be asked to investigate the feasibility of the provision of additional healthcare centres in Saddleworth and Chadderton when it considers the Capital Programme in a future year;
 - b) the relevant Cabinet Member and Officers report to the Select Committee to advise on activities underway in the area of green energy and climate change to allow the Committee to explore future possibilities;
 - c) the Select Committee receives a report on issues around brownfield site availability for housing in the Borough to enable further consideration of brownfield site remediation;
 - d) the Select Committee receives a report presenting details of the Highways work programme, with a particular focus on where and how funding for footpaths is determined and whether there is sense in diverting more funding towards footpaths;
3. with regard to the Liberal Democrat Investment Proposals -
 - a) the Cabinet be recommended to reverse the decision to reduce Parish Council Grant funding and re-instate the £15,000 budget;
 - b) the Cabinet be asked to look at the issue of School Holiday Food Clubs and try to find funding to

- provide additional support to School Holiday Clubs;
- c) the Cabinet be asked to undertake a review of the Corporate Priorities Budget to consider whether £15,000 funding of the annual Saddleworth Band Contest could be identified.

