SUMMONS ITEM 11



Meeting of Full Council 28th November 2005

Report from the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources

For Action Wards Affected:

Report Title: First Reading Debate on the 2006/07 to

2009/10 Budget

Forward Plan Ref:

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report, together with the separate report on this agenda on the priorities of the administration, meets the requirement in the Constitution (Standing Order 25(a)) that: 'In the case of the Council's annual budget, including the capital programme, the Executive shall present a report to Full Council setting out the financial position of the Council, financial forecasts for the following year and expenditure priorities.'
- 1.2 The 'First Reading Debate' forms the background for consultation by the Leader of the Council and the Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny on budget issues, and the subsequent proposals by the Executive on the 2006/07 budget. The Executive's budget proposals, which will be made at their meeting on 13th February 2006, will be subject to consideration by a joint meeting of Overview and Scrutiny prior to the budget and council tax decisions being made at Full Council on 6th March 2006.
- 1.3 The report is structured as follows:

Section 2 Recommendations

Section 3 Background to the 2006/07 to 2009/10 budget

Section 4 General Fund revenue budget issues

Section 5 Dedicated Schools Budget

Section 6 Housing Revenue Account

Section 7 The Capital Programme

Section 8 Timetable

Section 9 Financial implications

Section 10 Legal implications

Section 11 Diversity implications

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Full Council is recommended to consider the issues set out in this report when it holds its 'First Reading Debate' for the purposes of Standing Order 25(a).

3.0 Background to the 2006/07 to 2009/10 budget

- 3.1 The 2005/06 budget was agreed at Full Council on 28th February 2005. Key features of the budget agreed for 2005/06 were as follows:
 - A General Fund budget requirement of £367.2m in 2005/06;
 - A council tax increase for Brent services of 3.3% in 2005/06:
 - An overall council tax increase, including the GLA precept, of 3.8%, leading to a Council Tax for Band D properties of £1,184.14 in 2005/06;
 - Level of balances set at £6.75m for 2005/06, after a contribution of £250k to a 'spend to save' fund.
- 3.2 The 2005/06 budget report also set out financial projections for 2006/07 to 2008/09. The financial projections:
 - Assumed continuation of annual savings of 2% in the budget;
 - Identified potential budget growth, on top of inflation, of £7m in 2006/07 and more in subsequent years;
 - Forecast growth in central items in the budget;
 - Identified potential pressures on resources in future years, as a result of one-off funding provided in the 2005/06 local government finance settlement, changes to school funding, potential changes to funding formulae, and problems with population estimates.
- 3.3 The latest revenue budget monitoring report to the Executive on 14th November 2005 shows the council is on target to have balances at 31st March 2006 of £7.2m, marginally above the level set for 2005/06. There is currently a forecast overspend on services of £1.3m (0.3% of the total budget) but this is more than offset by an improved level of balances at 31st March 2005 following closure of the 2004/05 accounts. Measures are being taken to address potential overspends in 2005/06. If all services spend in line with budget, balances will be in the region of £8.5m at 31st March 2006.
- 3.4 The 3 year financial forecasts included in the 2005/06 budget report have formed the background for work on the 2006/07 to 2009/10 budget carried out over the past few months. This has focused on:
 - 1. Developing a sound basis for revised forecasts for the 2006/07 to 2009/10 budget (see Appendix 1) by:
 - Preparing detailed budget matrices for the next 3 years which build in pay and price inflation, increases to contributions to the Pension Fund, and 2% annual savings (Appendix 2);

- Identifying and quantifying:
 - o proposed budget savings (Appendix 3);
 - budget pressures (Appendix 4);
 - service budget priorities (Appendix 5);
- Reviewing central items (Appendix 6);
- 2. Making representations on issues affecting the 2006/07 local government finance settlement. The main challenges as far as external funding is concerned remain those identified in the 2005/06 budget report (see paragraph 3.2 above). The announcement on the settlement is expected in early December. The change to schools funding by itself means that the council is likely to receive the floor increase in grant in 2006/07. Appendix 1 includes the potential impact on Brent's grant assuming different levels of floor increase.
- 3. Preparing draft service development plans for 2006/07. It should be noted that the existing Corporate Strategy runs to the end of the current year. The draft plans have therefore been based on existing priorities continuing into 2006/07. This reflects the underlying direction in which the council has been travelling over the past few years. It also reflects the work done on developing a revised Community Strategy and early development work on the 2006-2010 Corporate Strategy. Draft service development plans for 2006/07 will be circulated before the Council meeting on 28th November. Details of achievements against the existing Corporate Strategy 2002-2006 are attached as Appendix 9.
- 3.5 The current projections in Appendix 1 show a potential budget gap in 2006/07 of £8.4m if the council is to achieve a council increase of 3.3% in line with the increase in 2005/06. Further budget reductions would be needed to get the increase below this level. It should be noted however that this gap is based on assumptions about the results of the local government finance settlement which have not yet been announced and potential budget pressures and service growth of over £8m which have not yet been subject to corporate scrutiny.

4.0 General Fund revenue budget issues

4.1 This section of the report sets out the key issues that will need to be addressed in finalising the General Fund revenue budget for 2006/07.

Service area budgets

- 4.2 The service area budget matrices in Appendix 2 are based on the following assumptions:
 - 2.95% increase in pay from 1 April 2006 in line with the 2004 local authority pay agreement (and 3% thereafter);
 - 2% annual increase in prices, which is slightly below current inflation levels of 2.5%;

- 2% annual increase in fees and charges to customers;
- an increase in employer Pension Fund contributions from the current 20.1% of pensionable pay to 21.6% in 2006/07, with further increases of 1.5% per annum in both 2007/08 and 2008/09;
- annual savings in service area budgets of 2%
- 4.3 Service area budgets do not at this stage include any provision for budget growth pressures or policy led growth (see paragraphs 4.7 and 4.8 below on growth).
- 4.4 Proposals for achieving the 2% savings target are attached as Appendix 3. Most of these savings were agreed as part of last year's budget process. There will be a report to the Executive on 12th December seeking confirmation of the recommended savings.
- 4.5 An officer level Efficiency Board has been set up to take forward a programme of efficiency savings as part of the wider Gershon agenda. Brent achieved the third highest efficiency savings in the country in 2004/05 but there are further opportunities to deliver savings through improved procurement practice, use of new technologies and other means. Savings put forward by service areas include efficiency savings at service level, but the Efficiency Board is looking at opportunities of savings which cut across services. This is a long term programme and in many cases savings will be achieved in later years, not 2006/07. But there will be some savings in 2006/07 which will contribute toward bridging the budget gap.
- 4.6 Services are also expected to generate additional income of at least 2% each year from increases in fees and charges. The council carried out a best value review of fees and charges in 2004 and this recommended that a more strategic view needed to be taken of fees and charges across the council. Officers therefore intend to report to the Executive on 16th January 2006 with recommendations for levels of fees and charges in 2006/07 across the range of council services, taking account of the impact of increases on services and users as well as the need to generate income to fund services from existing and new sources.

Growth

- 4.7 Growth has been categorised as:
 - budget pressures: These are detailed in Appendix 4 and consist of demand pressures resulting principally from demographic change, unavoidable contractual price increases, and income loss, for example, as a result of termination of government grants. Budget pressures identified by departments currently stand at £5.2m in 2006/07. These will be reviewed as part of the annual star chamber process in order to assess the extent to which measures can be taken to avoid this growth. It is expected that the £5.2m will reduce as a result of this process;

- service/corporate priorities: These are detailed in Appendix 5 and are the principal priorities for additional funding which will deliver service improvement. These total £3.1m in 2006/07 although in a number of cases provisional funding sources, which will not be a call on the General Fund budget, have been identified. There is a trade-off between the amount released for service priority growth and the level of council tax raised. It is expected that the £3.1m currently identified as service growth would have to be reduced to enable a council tax increase at or below the 2005/06 increase of 3.3%.
- 4.8 Once growth has been agreed by Full Council at the budget setting meeting on 6th March 2006, this will be added to service area budgets.

Central items

- 4.9 Central items are amounts which are not allocated to service area budgets. These are shown in Appendix 6.
- 4.10 Most of these items are not directly controllable by the council because they arise from past spending decisions eg the bulk of capital financing charges and premature retirement costs or they are determined by outside bodies eg levies, concessionary fares.¹
- 4.11 There are however central items over which the council has control. These include:
 - the cost of financing new borrowing under the prudential regime. The council has built around £13m of prudential borrowing into its capital programme for 2006/07 and 2007/08 although there is a lower level of assumed borrowing in 2008/09. Growth in financing charges to meet this borrowing is £1.3m in 2006/07 (although part of this is to meet the cost of borrowing already agreed for 2005/06), a further £1.3m in 2007/08 and a further £1m in 2008/09. Section 7 below sets out pressures on the capital programme from 2006/07 onwards, particularly from the schools programme, and it will be difficult to significantly reduce the level of borrowing in the capital programme and still meet demands for capital spending. Nevertheless this is an issue Members will need to consider. Each £1m reduction in prudential borrowing in 2006/07 reduces revenue spending by £32k in 2006/07 and £104k in a full year (ie from 2007/08 onwards);
 - the cost of Ward Working is also included in central items. The Ward Working pilots are currently being reviewed and until that review is completed it is not possible to make a firm estimate of the cost of the full roll-out of Ward Working planned for 2006/07. However, at this stage growth of £1m has been allowed against a base figure in 2005/06 of £500k (£250k in central items and £250k in the PRU cash limit);

¹ Note that the amount shown for freedom passes/concessionary fares in Appendix 6 is the increase expected. The current year spending on freedom passes of £7.3m is included in the adult services budget.

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- provision is also made within central items for increases in the costs of civic accommodation. The way in which this money is used depends on decisions on the proposed new civic centre. If the civic centre goes ahead funding will be needed to meet additional costs in the early years of the development. If it does not, the council will have to increase spending on the existing building stock to ensure it is fit for purpose. Funding is also needed to meet additional costs in 2008/09 and 2009/10 following the end of the rent free period for Brent House;
- central items also include funding for the South Kilburn and Wembley developments. These are core to the development of the borough's infrastructure and also help attract external funding. The funds are not however currently committed.

Reserves/risks

- 4.12 Budget plans for 2006/07 assume no use of balances to fund the budget. The council's balances currently stand at £7.2m but could increase to £8.5m if, as expected, overspending budgets are brought into line. This is more than the £7m of balances recommended and agreed in the 2006/07 budget on the basis of financial risks and the need to be able to plan the council's finances effectively over the medium term. Whilst the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources is satisfied that this level of balances is currently adequate because of the effective way in which the council manages financial risk, including potential overspends, the council's appointed auditor, PWC, has recently questioned whether £7m of balances is sufficient for a borough the size of Brent.
- 4.13 A full financial risk assessment will be carried out in advance of the 2006/07 budget setting meeting and at that stage the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources will recommend the level of balances he considers are necessary for 2006/07. Members should also note that use of balances is one-off and that therefore any budget shortfall met from balances in one year needs to be made up by real savings or council tax rises in following years.

Council tax increase

- 4.14 The projections assume a council tax increase of 3.3% in the Brent element of council tax in 2006/07, in line with the increase in 2005/06. Each 1% variation from this increase adds or takes away approximately £860k from this total. So if the council tax increase were to be set at 2.3%, the budget gap would increase by £860k, and if it were set at 4.3%, the budget gap would reduce by £860k. Members will need to take into account the fact that the government has made clear that it will use its capping powers to limit excessive increases in council tax which is likely to be anything in excess of 5%.
- 4.15 These figures do not include the precept that will be set by the GLA. The Mayor has written to each of the functional bodies that set a precept the Metropolitan Police, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, and Transport for London asking them to come up with budget proposals that would lead to an increase of no more than 5.5% in their element of the

precept. The increase in the precept would be on top of the £20 Olympic levy which will add 7.8% to the GLA precept, taking the total increase to 13.7%. The council has made representations to the functional bodies, and through the Association of London Government to the Mayor, for increases in functional body precepts to be below the 5.5% currently projected.

4.16 The level of council tax increase for the council is affected by the extent to which the council tax base has changed between 2005/06 and 2006/07. In addition, the GLA precept increase is affected by changes to the council tax base across London. The council tax base for Brent will be determined by the General Purposes Committee in January 2006. The GLA will know the impact of the council tax base on its precept once all London boroughs have set their council tax bases which they are required to do by the end of January 2006.

Government funding decisions

- 4.17 The estimated budget gap is affected fundamentally by decisions on local government funding in 2006/07 which will be announced shortly. At present the projections of grant assume that the council will be fully protected in the first year of the new system from the impact of ring-fencing schools budgets, and that we will receive a floor increase in grant of 2.5%. This depends on the government responding to representations made by the local government community for increases in the national total of funding for local government. If the increase is lower than this and there are no other compensating adjustments, the projected gap will be higher than set out in Appendix 1.
- 4.18 The government has introduced a Local Authority Business Growth Incentive Scheme under which councils retain a share of the proceeds of growth in the business rates base in their area. In Brent, we can expect quite significant growth as a result of re-opening of Wembley Stadium. It is anticipated that the council could receive up to £1.5m from the LABGI scheme in 2006/07. Currently we are assuming that the benefit of this will be offset by removal of one-off social services funding in 2005/06 for access and systems for older people and safeguarding children.

Longer term position

- 4.19 The council needs to look at spending decisions, and associated resource projections, over at least a three year period. This ensures effective service development and prevents the council having to make significant adjustments to its spending plans each year. It is important therefore that, when Members consider budget issues, they take account of the longer term impact. This means recognising that one-off resources, such as balances or one-off grants, can act as a palliative in one year of the budget cycle but cause problems in future years. It also means that, if there is new growth which is on-going, the resource implications in future years have to be considered.
- 4.20 The use of the council's prudential powers to allow additional capital spending requires forecasts to be made over a longer period, not only because assets last a long time but also because the costs have to be met over a long period.

The council produced a 30 year plan at the time the system was introduced in 2004/05 and we are looking to up-date this in advance of budget decisions in March 2006.

5.0 Dedicated Schools Budget

- 5.1 The introduction of the Dedicated Schools Budget from 1st April 2006 represents a fundamental change to the way in which the budget is constructed. Currently, schools' spending is part of the overall council budget, and is funded from a combination of formula grant (Revenue Support Grant and National Non-Domestic Rate income) and council tax. From 2006/07, schools' spending will be funded directly from a Dedicated Schools Grant. It will therefore be totally ring-fenced and not appear as part of the council's overall budget requirement. The result is that the £141.7m we currently spend on schools is removed from our base budget requirement. As a result, Appendix 1 shows the council's current budget as £225.5m rather than the £367.2m which was the agreed 2005/06 budget, including schools.
- 5.2 Under the new system, school budgets will cover more than one year. Local authorities will receive details of their provisional DSG allocations for both 2006/07 and 2007/08 before the start of 2006/07 and will be required to provide schools with both their actual 2006/07 individual allocations and their provisional 2007/08 allocations the latter being subject to further review before the start of 2007/08 based primarily on pupil number changes. From 2008/09, budgets will be announced (and provisionally allocated to schools) on a three-year cycle.
- 5.3 The Schools Forum, a statutory body comprising mainly elected representatives of head teachers and governors, has in the past had an advisory role in relation to the Schools Block, with Council Members being required to consider their views (although not necessarily accept them). Under the new arrangements, the Schools Forum will have greater decision-making powers in some areas. In particular, there is a requirement that the year on year increase in the local authority central element of the Schools Block (the Special Education Needs element and other areas) cannot be greater in percentage terms than the increase in funding delegated to schools, unless the Forum agrees a higher increase.
- The Department for Education and Skills have been consulting on the new arrangements for allocating the DSG to authorities. DfES had originally proposed that the DSG would be allocated to authorities based on their Schools Formula Spending Share (SFSS). This would have benefited authorities such as Brent that have historically spent below SFSS. Brent spends around £8m below SFSS and the additional funding under the original arrangements would have meant that this gap would have been eliminated over the coming four years. However, following representations from authorities whose schools would have lost out under this arrangement, the redistribution is likely to be more limited and consequently will take longer. The DfES is still to announce its final decision on distribution.

6.0 Housing Revenue Account

- 6.1 The HRA budget for 2005/06 was agreed at Full Council on 28th February 2005. Taking full account of the Government's rent restructuring guidance, this included a decision for an overall average rent increase of 3.8% for the main properties within the stock.
- 6.2 The HRA forecast outturn for 2005/06 is overall in line with budget. Officers are currently undertaking a detailed review of the forecast outturn, which will feed into the rent setting report for 2006/07.
- 6.3 The government has published their draft HRA Determinations and HRA Subsidy Determinations for 2006/07. The key issues in the draft determinations for Brent are as follows:
 - The rent restructuring review proposals will be implemented in full. This will introduce adjustments to the rents formulae to bring council and housing association rents fully into line. It is proposed however, to limit the maximum rise in an authority's average rent to 5% in both 2006/07 and 2007/08;
 - It is proposed that the HRA subsidy regime will move to a multi-year settlement, commencing with 2006/07 and 2007/08;
 - The proposed adjustments and uplifts to management and maintenance allowances, and guideline rents for 2006/07, give rise to a reduction in subsidy for Brent's HRA of £2.6m. Officers are making representations on certain issues in the draft subsidy proposals.
- 6.4 The way in which the HRA proportion of the housing element of local authority supported capital expenditure is determined has changed. In previous years it was determined by formula. For 2006-07, it will be determined based on the recommendations of the Regional Housing Boards. The draft determinations are silent on Brent's HRA supported capital allocation for 2006-07. Our 2005-06 allocation was £6.224m. Any allocation significantly less than this sum will have implications for the HRA and the delivery of our decent homes programme. Our allocation will be confirmed when the final determinations are published.
- 6.5 The final HRA and HRA subsidy determinations will be published towards the end of December 2005.
- 6.6 A full HRA budget report is scheduled to be presented to the Executive on 13th February 2006.

7.0 Capital Programme

7.1 As part of the budget process, Members have to consider the development of the capital programme for 2006/07 to 2009/10. The capital programme is expected to support the delivery of priorities within the council's corporate strategy. To do this, it needs to ensure that assets are in good condition, are

- suitable to meet the needs of service delivery, and are sufficient to meet new demands. The limited resources mean schemes have to be prioritised and alternative sources of funding identified.
- 7.2 Appendix 7 summarises the current 2005/06 to 2008/09 non-housing capital programme. It identifies the main areas within the programme and the key outcomes expected from each. The allocation of resources to individual services is set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Current 2005/09 non-HRA capital programme

Programme Detail	2005/06 Capital Programme £000	2006/07 Capital Programme £000	2007/08 Capital Programme £000	2008/09 Capital Programme £000
Total Non-HRA Resources	65,771	38,998	39,078	29,657
Service Area Expenditure:				
Children and Families	17,146	20,263	19,048	8,528
Environment and Culture	24,905	10,045	9,588	9,600
Housing and Community Care - Adults	531	150	950	350
Housing & Community Care – GF Housing	10,756	9,569	9,269	9,269
Finance & Corporate Resources	2,459	755	825	530
Central Items	7,090	1,380	1,380	1,380
Total Non-HRA Expenditure	62,887	42,162	41,060	29,657
Non-HRA (Surplus)/Deficit	(2,884)	3,164	1,982	0

7.3 Details of the resources currently used to fund the capital programme are set out in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Resources to fund the 2005/09 non-HRA capital programme

Resources	2005/06 Resources £000	2006/07 Resources £000	2007/08 Resources £000	2008/09 Resources £000
Grant	21,092	12,880	14,683	13,568
Right to buy receipts	2,500	1,750	1,750	1,750
Other capital receipts	1,900	1,358	200	200
Resources carried forward	15,949	0	0	0
Section 106	4,527	0	0	0
Supported borrowing	6,310	9,876	10,145	10,500
Prudential borrowing	13,493	13,134	12,300	3,639
Total Non-HRA Resources	65,771	38,998	39,078	29,657

- 7.4 The capital programme has delivered improvements in capital assets over recent years. These include improvements to the condition of school buildings, the transport infrastructure, roads and pavements, parks, and private sector housing, including facilities for people with disabilities. In addition, spending in the HRA capital programme has led to a significant increase in the number of council-owned homes which meet the decent housing standard. There are however continuing pressures on the capital programme, particularly to meet the need for additional school places and to ensure the council's property portfolio is properly maintained.
- 7.5 The key issues Members need to consider are:
 - the level of prudential borrowing that can be sustained over the longer term. Currently prudential borrowing is approximately £13m per annum. This level of borrowing puts pressure on the capital financing charges that have to be met in the General Fund budget. Levels of capital financing charges to fund prudential borrowing increase from £1.9m in 2005/06 to £3.3m in 2006/07, £4.6m in 2007/08, and £5.6m in 2008/09 (see Appendix 6):
 - the need to meet new demands on the capital programme, particularly arising from increasing pupil numbers and the need to ensure the condition of corporate property is addressed; and
 - the extent to which priorities within the existing programme still apply.

8.0 Timetable

- 8.1 The timetable for finalising the 2006/07 budget is attached as Appendix 8. Key dates are as follows:
 - provisional local government finance settlement expected near the beginning of December;
 - service area budgets to be considered by Executive on 12th December, including savings proposals;
 - Executive makes its recommendation on the budget and council tax for 2006/07 on 13th February;
 - Joint meeting of Overview and Scrutiny in the second half of February to consider the Executive's recommendations;
 - GLA precept determined before the end of February;
 - Full Council determines budget and council tax for 2006/07 on 6th March.

9.0 Financial Implications

9.1 The report is entirely concerned with financial implications.

10.0 Legal Implications

- 10.1 The Council's Standing Orders contain detailed rules on the development of the Council's budget. Some elements of these rules are required by the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) Regulations 2001 but a number are locally determined.
- 10.2 In the case of the council's annual budget, including the capital programme, the Executive is required under the Constitution to present a report to Full Council setting out the financial position of the council, financial forecasts for the following year and expenditure priorities. This report sets out the required information. There will then follow a debate on the issues raised herein, which will be conducted in accordance with Standing Order 44.
- 10.3 Following the First Reading Debate, a record of the debate will be sent to the Leader and to the Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny. The Executive will take issues raised in the debate into account when preparing their detailed proposals for the budget and those proposals will then be submitted to a joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- 10.4 The final proposals will be submitted by the Leader to a special meeting of Full Council for consideration and determination no later than 10th March in accordance with Standing Order 34. There is a statutory dispute procedure set out in Standing Order 25 to deal with circumstances where there is a disagreement between the Council and Executive on the budget proposals.

11.0 Diversity Implications

11.1 Prioritisation and decision making as part of the budget process are tied into the council's corporate strategy, individual strategies and service development plans. The priorities within these reflect the council's commitment to tackling discrimination and disadvantage as part of its Comprehensive Equality Plan (CEP). In addition, services have been required to carry out Impact Need and Requirements Assessments in developing individual growth and savings proposals. The impact of budget decisions is monitored through the council's performance monitoring systems. Members need to bear in mind the diversity implications of the proposals they put forward as part of the First Reading Debate.

12.0 Background Papers

- Corporate Strategy 2002-2006
- Priorities for the Administration report from the Executive on this agenda
- Draft service development plans for 2006/07 circulated with this agenda
- 2005/06 budget and council tax report Full Council on 28th February 2005
- 2005/06 revenue budget monitoring report the Executive on 14th November 2005
- Capital programme monitoring the Executive on 14th November 2005

13.0 Contact Officers

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