

APPENDIX 1

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23RD JANUARY 2006

The Cabinet Lead Member advised that the proposed budget recognised the significant cost pressures facing the Department and also provided both revenue and capital growth for service improvements. There was also a need for the Department to improve efficiency and to achieve further savings from lower priority areas. Overall he considered the budget to be a fair budget.

REVENUE BUDGET 2006/07

a) **Service Improvements**

- i) A part of the additional £106,000 included for new Trading Standards' statutory obligations was to provide resources to target anti-social behaviour and promote community safety by a more rigorous enforcement of sales of alcohol, knives, fireworks, solvents and aerosol paints. Rigorous action was already being taken in respect of underage sales of tobacco.

b) **Demand and Cost Pressures**

- (ii) The County Council had recognised the cost implications of the new job evaluation system and had in previous years agreed to meet the cost of the scheme. The provision now included in the budget reflected this commitment.
- (iii) The additional allocation of £187, 000 for energy costs was to cover the 60% increase in wholesale prices of gas and electricity. The County Council was taking steps to ensure that energy efficiency was promoted. The Department had particular requirements regarding temperature and environment control in a number of buildings. Energy costs were regularly monitored.
- (iv) The forecast reduction in income of £50, 000 for libraries was to recognise the decline in lending of CDs and DVDs over the last few years. In addition the charges for such loans needed to be kept low in view of increased competition from other suppliers, particularly those selling over the internet.

c) **Service Reductions**

The saving of £50, 000 on Environmental Action and Regeneration in 2006/07 rising to £100, 000 in 2007/08, would be achieved by

considering carefully lower priority programme areas. The details of these savings were in the process of being developed and would be reported to this Committee in the near future.

d) Efficiency Savings

The Department was currently undertaking a review of service delivery to rural areas, the outcome of which would be reported to the Committee. Members were assured that the proposed reduction of £28, 000 would not result in mobile library services being withdrawn from any settlement currently receiving the service.

e) Civil Partnerships

Members were assured that increased demand for this service following the recent introduction of civil partnerships had been met through increasing staffing hours and through the fees payable for civil ceremonies.

Other Issues raised – Enforcement of 7.5 tonne weight restrictions

In response to questions, the Cabinet Lead Member undertook to consider further the suggestion put forward by members that consideration should be given to additional resources being provided to enforce weight restrictions on lorries, given the considerable public concern and the impact of these lorries on the infrastructure.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2006/07 TO 2008/09

- (i) The County Council was currently in discussion with Raynsway Partnership about their developer contribution towards the building of a Visitors' Centre at Watermead Park. The Department was also in close contact with MOSAIC about their efforts to raise funding for the project.

If there were difficulties in putting together the funding required for the Visitors' Centre as currently proposed, the Department would seek to work with partners for the development of an alternative more modest scheme.

- (ii) The Ashby Canal extension from Snarestone to Measham would cost an estimated £13.1 million in total, with work being carried out in two phases. A bid for £7 million, for phase one, was part of a larger bid to the Big Lottery Fund by the Heart of the National Forest Foundation.

External Funding

The Department had been successful in obtaining external funding and would continue its efforts to do so. In the future, around 50% of Lottery funding would be through Big Lottery schemes, and a number of new programmes were to be announced shortly. Consideration was being given to ensuring that where opportunities were identified these were drawn to the attention of officers across the County Council so that, where appropriate, corporate bids could be put together.

Decision

That the proposed Revenue Budget 2006/07 and Capital Programme 2006/07 to 2008/09 be noted and the comments now made be forwarded to the Scrutiny Commission.