



COMMUNITY SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19 JANUARY 2009

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2009/10 TO 2012/13

MINUTE EXTRACT

The Committee considered a joint report of the Director of Community Services and the Director of Corporate Resources concerning the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2009/10 to 2012/13. A copy of the report marked 'B' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr. E. F. White CC, the Cabinet Lead Member for Community Services.

Mr. White CC in introducing the report advised the Committee that, given the current financial downturn, the Department had been allocated a very reasonable settlement. He further advised members that, although the Capital Programme for 2010/11 and beyond was at this stage only provisional, the fall in the level of capital receipts would mean a thorough review of the Department's commitments would be necessary in order that capital spending was kept to the limit of £300k per annum. Mr. White took the opportunity to congratulate the Department on provisionally achieving over £4 million of external funding for 2009/10.

In response to questions, the Committee was informed as follows:

Efficiencies

- (a) The Government had set a target of 3% cashable savings. For 2009/10 the Department had identified all of the required savings but had yet to achieve them. For 2010/11 some of the required savings had been identified but it was clear that the Department faced a significant challenge in achieving the full sum of the required savings;
- (b) Efficiency savings in future years would, to some degree, be dependant on corporate initiatives eg. the Change Management Programme, procurement and re-engineering of processes. Whilst this was challenging, there remained scope for further savings;
- (c) The Pre-Budget Report had identified the need for further efficiency savings of £5 billion from the public sector but no details were available as to how this was to be allocated. There was a possibility that it could result in the efficiency target increasing from 3%.

Service Improvements

PLANCON

- (d) The proposed replacement of the in-house planning database was necessary to ensure that the system was fit for purpose and compatible with district/borough council systems and met National Government requirements. £60k was the estimated revenue consequence of the capital investment in the new system and was primarily for ongoing support and maintenance costs;
- (e) A detailed business case was being prepared by the Department and would be made available to members in due course.

Public Rights of Way – bridge inspection

- (f) There was currently no budget provision for bridge inspection work on footpaths and bridleways, which was a health and safety requirement. The intention was to commission the inspection work from the Highways, Transportation and Waste Management Department.

Bosworth Battlefield – Medieval Village

- (g) One-off funding of £10k was proposed for improvement works to the Medieval Village buildings at Bosworth Battlefield.

Inflation

- (h) The level of provision for pay and price inflation was queried in the light of reductions in inflation indices in the wider economy. The point was made that the County Council's purchasing pattern was different from that of domestic households.

Demand and Cost Increases

Registration Services

- (h) The Job Evaluation budget related to the anticipated additional costs of assimilating statutory officers formerly managed by the Government's General Register Office that had recently 'transferred' to the County Council within the pay structure;
- (i) A report on this issue would be made available to members in due course.

Melton Library

- (j) The growth budget related to a property service charge to be made for the Library situated at Melton College. This had not been increased for a number of years.

Savings

Bibliographical Services

- (k) A national scheme commissioned by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council to transform the way in which book stock was procured, and through which significant savings had been anticipated, had unfortunately proved not to be feasible;
- (l) Savings would therefore be achieved instead through four redundancies – these related to two full-time Development Librarians, one clerical post and one Literature Development Librarian. Of these, one was a voluntary redundancy and the other three compulsory. A number of technological improvements in the service had enabled this saving, which meant that online procurement of book stock directly from suppliers had reduced the staff requirement in this area;
- (m) The role of Area Community Managers had been developed and this had had a direct impact on the two full-time Development Librarians and the Literature Development Librarian who were no longer required, as referred to in (l) above.

Self Service

- (n) The proposals to replace traditional library counters with 'self service terminals' in 16 libraries were similar to those which had been successfully put in place by a number of other Local Authorities and would enable staff who would previously have been behind the counter, to be closer to members of the public and offer advice. This would also allow for a reduction in staff levels;
- (o) The proposed staffing reductions equated to 19 posts from a staff complement of approximately 450. It was hoped that the majority of these could be achieved through staff turnover and without recourse to compulsory redundancies.

Park Rangers (a saving identified in 2008/09)

- (p) A reduction in Park Rangers from 17 to 14 was linked to a planned reduction in the Parks portfolio as agreed last year and a reduction in their duties in relation to administration and maintenance. The Rangers were currently stretched and there were three vacancies that were being recruited to at present.

Capital Programme

Library Refurbishment

- (q) There was a need to review the refurbishment programme in light of reduced resources.

Ashby Canal Project

- (r) It was planned to finish the next phase of the Project shortly using £110k funding from the Capital Programme and external funding of approximately £450k from emda, subject to the approval of a bid later this month. Achieving the 10-20% matched funding requirements for subsequent phases of the Project would be likely to prove problematic but the Department would continue to investigate possibilities for external funding. Low level investment would be planned to carry out further technical and preparatory work over the next three years.

(Prior to the Committee coming to a view on the item, Mr. White CC, having declared a personal and prejudicial interest, left the room.)

It was moved by Mr. Stanley CC and seconded by Mr. Legrys CC:

“That the Cabinet be asked to consider a growth item of £50k in 2009/10 (and £75k in subsequent years) for the addition of two Park Rangers within the Countryside Section.”

The motion was put and not carried: three members voting for and eight against.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee notes the proposed revenue budget and Capital Programme for the Community Services Department;
- (b) That the Committee notes that, due to the current economic climate and, in particular, the dramatic decline in capital receipts, the previous commitments made to the Community Services Capital programme can no longer be sustained. The Committee nevertheless urges the Cabinet and officers to continue to monitor potential opportunities for external funding which may assist in progressing some of the previous commitments;
- (c) That the Director of Community Services be requested to submit a report to a future meeting of the Committee on the feasibility of pursuing the potential areas for efficiency savings that were identified at the Committee’s workshop on 3 November 2008.