

**BUDGET AND
PERFORMANCE PANEL**

2.00 P.M.

1ST FEBRUARY 2005

PRESENT:- Councillors Keith Budden (Chairman), John Gilbert (Vice-Chairman), Tina Clifford, Mike Greenall, Tony Johnson, Janie Kirkman, Peter Robinson, Roger Sherlock and John Whitelegg

Officers in attendance:-

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Mark Cullinan | Chief Executive |
| Nadine Muschamp | Head of Financial Services |
| Elizabeth Stokes | Best Value Officer |
| Richard Tulej | Head of Corporate Strategy |
| James Doble | Principal Democratic Support Officer |
| Georgina Atkinson | Democratic Support Officer |

24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

It was noted that all Councillors had been invited to the meeting and Councillor Ron Sands passed on his apologies.

25 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7th December 2004 were signed by the Chairman as an accurate record.

26 BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK PROPOSALS FOR 2005/06

Councillor Barker was welcomed to the meeting by the Chairman of the Panel. He explained that the Corporate Plan and Budget were still in preparation and the proposals were awaiting approval at next week's Council meeting. He added that the Corporate Plan was currently at an early stage and it's content had been aligned closely to the Community Strategy.

He drew Members attention to the documents that had been distributed at the meeting titled Coalition Review of Priorities, Introduction of the Corporate Plan Third Draft, and Future Budget Proposals.

In the course of the discussion Members questioned the following areas of the proposals:

- Council Tax
- Access to Services Review
- City Contract Services
- 'Our Vision' in the Corporate Plan
- Footpath maintenance
- Tree Policy

In response regarding Council Tax, Councillor Barker explained that the County Council were attempting to maintain their increase to approximately 3.5 per cent. The Police and

Fire Authority levels were said to be announced around mid-February.

The Access to Services Review was a prime example of how one Council policy could significantly influence the direction of the Council, its Corporate Plan and the Budget. He advised that a Cabinet decision had been passed to maintain the two Town Halls, but sell other council-owned buildings that were currently used for operational purposes. The proposed Customer Access Centres would be located in the two Town Halls. He confirmed that all Council services would just about fit into the two Town Halls with the need for some changes and possible building extensions and retaining some of the more important public rooms.

With regards to Highways Partnership Members were informed that problems lay with the contractor side of the Partnership and a lack of IT systems to monitor the budget and finances, and therefore the management of the Service's finances were suffering. He advised that a review of the contract with Lancashire County Council could be made during the outturn for the financial year.

Regarding 'Our Vision', the Chief Executive explained that the shift in emphasis of the Corporate Plan had altered and so the vision had to be altered accordingly. He added that the unique feature of Lancaster was its higher education facilities, which he felt needed to be maximised in terms of developing Lancaster's economic future. Therefore, the emphasis needed to be changed from a historical past to a modern future.

Councillor Barker briefed Members on the Council's finances and informed that they were now more sound and secure. It was reported that the Audit Inspection had deemed Lancaster City Council as financially secure and had praised the Star Chamber process for its ongoing efficiency work.

Councillor Barker advised Members that for 2005/06 a substantial amount of Revenue funding had been allocated for the renewal of vehicle leases. It was reported that many vehicles had passed their economic lifespan and so were costing the Council in terms of repairs and downtime. A significant revision of this renewal had been considered, with the proposal of a Fleet Manager to properly implement the changes. He advised that the majority of vehicles were based in City Contract Services, but that some other services would also be involved.

Regarding expenditure on footpath maintenance, Councillor Barker advised that Lancashire County Council currently provided approximately £1,300 towards footpath maintenance within the Urban Core. He felt that some footpaths were significantly used more than others and therefore the Council required more funding to maintain them accordingly.

Regarding Tree Policy Implications, the Head of Financial Services informed Members that the Council's insurers would not generally withdraw cover providing the Council had 'acted reasonably' and taken adequate measure to avoid damage and injury.

Resolved:

That the Budget proposals be noted.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 4.00 p.m.)

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Georgina Atkinson, Administration Services - telephone (01524) 582132 or email
gatkison2@lancaster.gov.uk**