

ACTION NOTES FROM STAR CHAMBER HELD ON 7 NOVEMBER 2007

PRESENT: Councillors R Mace (Chair), E Archer, J Barry, A Bryning
M Cullinan, J Donnellon, P Loker, R Muckle, N Muschamp, J Barlow

1 APOLOGIES

John Gilbert

2 NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The record of the last meeting was noted.

Update

Directors confirmed that processes were in place for progressing outstanding actions and requests for further information.

The requested report on officer training would be distributed via the courier on Thursday.

Information about member training was tabled at the meeting. Cabinet reports requested had been placed in the Forward Plan.

**1 BASE BUDGET REVIEW AND VALUE FOR MONEY ASSESSMENT
FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE DIRECTORATE**

Corporate Strategy

Sustainability – It was noted that support for sustainable communities and responding to climate change were currently 2 of the 6 objectives proposed for the next Corporate Plan. Noted that the target in the current Corporate Plan to prepare a 5 yr Climate Change strategy was being developed through the Climate Change Cabinet Liaison Group. There could be finance implications arising from this and these would be reported back to a future meeting.

Will await outcome of Overview & Scrutiny's consideration of the Allotment report prepared by the local allotment association. Recommendations in the report currently include requests for both revenue and capital growth.

Local Strategic Partnership – Noted current City Council support arrangements for the LSP. No support for changes at this stage.

Community Safety Partnership – Noted current City Council support arrangements for the CSP. Requested further report back on the financial contributions made to the CSP which were at the discretion of the council.

Children and Young People – Noted that engagement with C&YP was identified as a key priority for the Council. There might be a growth item to consider coming out of the new Children and Young People's Strategy and this would be known before the end of the year.

A briefing note was requested on the Young Advisor Scheme.

It was also requested that provision for C&YP be discussed at the next Lancaster Leaders meeting with the Chief Executive of the County Council.

Performance and Projects – a report was due back on the long-term feasibility of supporting the Project Manager's post.

It was agreed to review this further once the result of the CPA was known.

Communications and Consultation – further information was requested in a report back to Star Chamber concerning the work programme and officer structure.

It was noted that the efficiencies resulting from the work of the Print, Design and Distribution group would be progressed and built into the base budget as appropriate.

Information and Customer Services

Customer Services – noted that the development of customer services was a council priority and was being delivered through the Access to Service Project group. There were no recommendations for the budget process.

Application Support – information was requested on the costing implications of the current arrangements for licensing Microsoft products and opportunities for efficiencies.

Desktop and Telephony – noted the latest position.

Financial Services

Noted that approximately £8,000 savings had been made on banking efficiencies which would be built into the base budget .

Other changes were taking place that needed bedding in before efficiencies could be quantified. These included the update of the Financial Computer System, introduction of EDMS, income management improvements, the future re-tendering of securicor services, and further efficiencies in Treasury Management and Insurance. Where savings could be identified they would be built into the base budget.

Revenue Services

The draft Cabinet report on the restructure of the Service identified savings of c£70K in 2008/09, c£90K in 2009/10 and c£93K in 2010/11. The full report would be considered at the December Cabinet.

2 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

14 November 2007. Cllr Gilbert would be Chair. Apologies from Cllrs Mace and Barry. Cllr M Whitelegg would substitute for Cllr Barry. The next meeting would concentrate on the current position.

RCM/JEB/7 November 2007

ACTION NOTES FROM STAR CHAMBER HELD ON 14 NOVEMBER 2007

PRESENT: Councillors A Bryning, J Gilbert (Chair), V Histed, D Kerr, M Whitelegg
M Cullinan, P Loker, N Muschamp, J Barlow

1 APOLOGIES

Cllrs R Mace, E Archer, J Barry. R Muckle and J Donnellon

2 NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The record of the last meeting was noted. There was nothing arising.

3 UPDATE ON THE CURRENT POSITION

The group considered the report of the Corporate Director (Finance and Performance) and attachments, which included the most recent Corporate Financial Monitoring report; the existing Star Chamber timetable; a table showing information/reports/briefing notes requested to date by Star Chamber, and where completed, timetabled or still outstanding; a table showing provisional savings and growth identified to date by Star Chamber.

It was noted that many of the outstanding items were cross-referenced on the timetable to be brought back for consideration in December and members were reassured that officers were working on reports. Members felt it would be useful to indicate deadlines for all requested reports.

Work To Do

Storey – it was agreed that the existing known figure for the Storey should be included on the list of provisional savings regardless of the ongoing negotiations with the County Council.

Member Training – £10K had been included on the list of provisional savings.

Domestic Violence Training and Education Packs – this had been a one-off item on the budget for this year. Finance had included it as a recurring item and could now take as a saving (£3k).

Tourism Advertising – N Muschamp to liaise with R Muckle about a report back.

Outstanding items were placed on the timetable for consideration at the next meeting of Star Chamber with the exception of items requested on 7 November which should be timetabled as soon as possible. A small number of remaining outstanding items would be timetabled when information was available. Outstanding items that would not make a difference to the current budget process, would be reported back later in the year. The timetable and 'work to do' table would be amended accordingly.

Corporate Financial Monitoring

Financial Services were testing out variances to identify ongoing savings. An underspend on the budget was forecast. A positive report back to Cabinet on sundry debtors was expected. Savings had been achieved this year on insurance. Costs and savings from the reduction in CC(D)S business would be known in December.

Members requested a more definite indication of when decisions were needed from them on provisional savings recommendations. Officers advised that Budget Council in February 2007 was the final opportunity for Members to make recommendations but that it was advisable to have one final draft Budget in place before then to avoid a protracted meeting.

4 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY LEVEL 2

Staff resources required to achieve E&D Level 2 were currently employed on the Fair Pay process. The contingency fund for Fair Pay could be used to employ external consultants for E&D which would cost more than £20K. Level 2 was not a statutory requirement and the extra costs could be avoided if the target was slipped by a municipal year. Members were in favour of this.

5 USE OF CONSULTANTS

The Chief Executive to ask Service Heads to discuss with Cabinet members the logic behind intermittent use of external consultants by Services.

2 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

10.00 a.m. 21 November 2007.

It was agreed that Star Chamber agenda should be sent to all Cabinet members so they could keep abreast of matters in the event of substitutions being required as was the case at this meeting.

JEB/14 November 2007

ACTION NOTES FROM STAR CHAMBER HELD ON 21 NOVEMBER 2007

PRESENT: Councillors E Archer, A Bryning, J Gilbert (Chair), M Whitelegg
M Cullinan, J Donnellon, N Muschamp, J Barlow

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor R Mace, Peter Loker, Roger Muckle.

2 SAVINGS AND GROWTH OPTIONS

Clarification was requested on a number of issues on the Savings/Growth options information produced for the previous meeting. Waste Collection Cost Sharing – this was still in negotiation with County and was likely to have a positive outcome. Grounds Maintenance Trade Contracts and Building Cleaning savings were long term issues likely to incur additional costs. Planning EDMS was likely to produce Gershon savings but a more detailed report on savings would be prepared when the system had filtered out to other Services. Parking Permits were discussed and it was noted a report is scheduled for consideration at December's Cabinet on the cost of permits for employees. As part of this discussion the Chief Executive confirmed that councillors and employees should not park at the front of Morecambe Town Hall but use the available parking at the side of the building and either use their permits or re-claim expenses in the usual way.

3 NOTES

The record of the previous meeting was noted.

Storey – a sum of £50K allocated to the repair of the retaining wall is being disputed with the County Council regarding whose liability it is and should therefore be added to the list of provisional costs.

4 REGENERATION DIRECTORATE – UPDATES

Information requested on a number of issues at the meeting on 17 October was considered.

Morecambe TIC lease; Planning EDMS, Property Review, Neighbourhood Task Force. No provisional savings were identified.

Estate Management – Ryelands House – this could produce a small saving on running costs and staffing. Negotiations were ongoing with the Health Service and pressure to complete them would be sustained.

Invest to Save Opportunities – Voltage Reduction. Cllr Gilbert requested a copy of the technical paper. It was agreed to pursue this further and to include as a possible option for savings.

Cultural Services

Information requested about Festivals & Events, Leisure and Arts Development was considered.

A review of employee related costs to be undertaken for Festivals and Events with a view to delivering the same events at a reduced cost and therefore in a different way.

Play Schemes – work had been done in previous years on options for charging. This work to be updated and brought back to Star Chamber.

Members were reminded that full reports were due for consideration at December Cabinet on the Dome, Lancaster Market, NPDO/Trust and The Dukes.

5 STOREY GALLERY LTD

£35K was currently included in the current Business Plan for the Storey. It was in effect a small grant from the Council. Members would need to decide at what level they wanted to maintain support.

6 DUTY EMERGENCY INCIDENT OFFICERS

A report was provided for information on the Council's statutory responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act. Star Chamber was advised that the costs of the operation of the scheme were included in the Budget.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Establishment – a request was made to look at the overall employee Establishment of the Council to identify provisional savings. The Chief Executive explained that the agreed approach of Star Chamber had been to look at the various activities of the Council in conjunction with the priorities, to make recommendations for savings, and any implications for the Establishment from these savings to be dealt with as and when necessary. However, because Star Chamber had reached the end of the process for reviewing Services' base budgets, with the exception of a small number of reports that were due back, a review of the employee Establishment should not delay other matters.

JEB/21 November 2007