

ACTION NOTES FROM STAR CHAMBER HELD ON 12 DECEMBER 2007

PRESENT: Councillors R Mace (Chair), J Barry, A Bryning, D Kerr
M Cullinan, P Loker, R Muckle, N Muschamp, J Barlow (notes)

1 APOLOGIES

John Donnellon

2 NOTES

Savings and Growth Options – County had agreed to waste collection cost-sharing and this would generate income, the exact figure not known yet.

Outstanding Actions

The Voltage Reduction technical paper was still to be circulated.

Cultural Services – work on the review of Festivals and Events employee related costs was still outstanding.

3 SUMMER PLAYSCHMES

The paper was noted.

4 PAEDIATRIC DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

Report noted. This was an issue for 2009/10 financial year. The backlog could be managed within existing budgets for 2008/09.

5 CAPITAL PROGRAMME / REVENUE BUDGET UPDATE

Revenue

The panel considered the future years' budgets, provisional settlement and associated Council Tax rates. For 2008/09 to achieve a Council Tax increase of 4.5% reduced savings of £73K were now required – but this figure assumed no further growth items. Savings targets for 2009/10 and 2010/11 were £736 and £1.556 respectively. Savings to reach the current target of 4.5% had already been identified.

Reasons for the reduction in required savings were twofold; a better than expected Settlement figure from Government; and improved financial management by the Council's Service Managers throughout the year.

£300K had been allocated to strengthen Provisions and Reserves Fund from the additional savings in the current year to cover unexpected over-budget costs, e.g. Planning, Ombudsman, etc.

Information on an increase to the Pensions contribution for the next 3 years was largely as expected from County and would require a decision from Cabinet in January or February. This was not expected to be an adverse pressure on the budget.

A 3% efficiency saving target had been set for local authorities for the next 3 years. In general it was good practice to look for savings for future years and to help maintain balances. It was also helpful to have a set target for each year in order to maintain focus on savings and efficiencies. This target is approximate to the savings needed each year to meet the Council Tax increase targets.

Capital

The panel looked at the draft General Fund Capital Programme for 2007/08 to 2012/13. There was a shortfall of £814K at the end of the 5 year period after including new bids received to date. This also assumed that all capital receipt targets were met. Members were asked to consider the draft Programme and the attached project documentation for the latest bids. All items from 2008/09 onwards could be reviewed. Options for cutting the deficit included cutting schemes from the programme, reducing schemes, reviewing asset disposals, borrowing, revenue financing.

The view was strongly expressed that contingency plans should be in place in the event that anticipated capital receipts were not achieved.

It was noted that a report reviewing the capital receipts position would go to January Cabinet which would include the latest position on land at Nightingale Hall Farm.

A report back to Star Chamber was requested on the position regarding the house at Morecambe Town Hall.

Savings and Growth as at 12 December 2007

The Panel considered lists of savings and growth identified to date by Star Chamber. Members didn't want to make any changes and requested further work be done to update/include figures.

A further report was requested on Invest To Save Energy Reduction in other Council buildings in respect of the £20K included in the Capital Programme.

The financial implications of the Council's Climate Change strategy should be considered and it was noted this should be brought forward to be discussed in January in order for it to be included in the current budget process.

6 CIVIL CONTINGENCIES - JOINT WORKING WITH OTHER AUTHORITIES

Further work had been done and no major cost savings would be made by joint working arrangements.

7 HEALTH AND STRATEGIC HOUSING – DOG CONTROL ORDERS

A one-off growth bid of £12K was provisionally agreed for inclusion in the list of growth items, with the option to reduce if necessary.

8 HEALTH AND STRATEGIC HOUSING – STRAY DOGS – NEW STATUTORY DUTY

As a statutory duty, £7K would be included in the list of growth items.

9 FOOD SAFETY AND HEALTH AND SAFETY TEAMS

Star Chamber requested this item. The services were running efficiently and effectively and no growth items or savings were identified.

10 HEALTH AND STRATEGIC HOUSING - EMERGENCY CALL-OUT SERVICE

This was not a statutory requirement, but it supported a statutory function. It could be offered as a saving but officers advised it was working well.

Extra information was requested on the results of call-outs.

11 HOMELESS MEDICAL ASSESSMENT SERVICE

Noted, savings not identified.

12 CEMETERIES CONTRACTUAL GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

Star Chamber had requested this item. Essentially the report was about a cost-shifting exercise (from CC(D)S to a Cemeteries Team) and it was agreed to keep the current level of budget for Cemeteries, but to remain within CC(D)S. No savings were identified. Over the last 18 months improvements resulting in efficiencies had been achieved and consequently included in outturn figures.

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

10.00 a.m. Wednesday 19 December 2007.

JEB/12 December 2007

ACTION NOTES FROM STAR CHAMBER HELD ON 19 DECEMBER 2007

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

1 APOLOGIES

None.

2 NOTES OF LAST MEETING

Councillors Gilbert and Archer should be added to Apologies for Absence.

Voltage Reduction Technical Paper – updated paper to be included in the report to Star Chamber on 16 January.

Cultural Services – Festivals and Events – a report was due back to Star Chamber in January.

House at Morecambe Town Hall – this would be incorporated in the fuller report to a January Star Chamber reviewing all council properties.

Invest to Save Energy Reduction – a date to be identified for when to include on Star Chamber timetable.

Climate Change Financial Implications – report scheduled for February Cabinet but should preferably be considered in January so any financial implications could be included in next 2008/09 budget.

3 CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL

A report on the new Concessionary Transport 2008 Scheme was considered. It was the general consensus of opinion at a recent Lancashire Leaders' meeting that all authorities would fall-in with the statutory scheme, i.e. removing peak time travel concessions.

4 COMMUNITY TRANSPORT (CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL)

A decision would be required by Cabinet in January on whether support should continue or be modified. The report to include available information on the current arrangements, e.g. if a ceiling could be put on costs, if overlapping routes could be reduced, if prescribed routes could be identified for support. As the main Concessionary Travel scheme is changing this element needs to be reviewed. It was also a good time to bring all community transport under one funding stream and therefore the existing separate grant also needs reviewing.

A report was scheduled for January Cabinet covering all relevant concessionary travel issues, but further meetings are being held county-wide, and this may impact on timescales for reporting.

5 REVENUE BUDGET UPDATE – VARIANCES

This was still being worked on in Financial Services. It was noted, however, that the estimated underspendings in the current year (and the resulting increase in surplus balances) were already incorporated into draft budget projections for future years, as appropriate.

6 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The panel looked at the current programme and in particular new bids. Externally funded bids would be monitored to identify any potential growth implications for the Council.

District Playground Improvements – update Star Chamber on previous Cabinet decision (re prioritisation list of play areas).

Lancaster Hub TIC Refurbishment – review and report back to Star Chamber on the scope for a reduced specification to provide the same services.

Morecambe Battery PC Provision – to be removed from the programme proposals until after a further review in the next financial year to include the “adopt a toilet” scheme.

White Lund Depot Car Park – costing to be checked.

Salt Ayre Schemes – report back on prioritisation / re-phasing.

The Platform Upgrade – decision (on inclusion in programme) to be based on business case.

JEB/7 January 2007