

Community Focus Scrutiny Committee



Date:	19, 20 and 26 January 2011
Venue:	United Reform Church Hall, St Annes (19 January) Town Hall, St Annes (20 and 26 January)
Committee members:	Councillor Keith Hyde (Chairman) Councillor Roger Small (Vice-Chairman) Councillors Christine Akeroyd, Barbara Douglas, Tony Ford, Kathleen Harper, Ken Hopwood, Linda Nulty, Janine Owen, Barbara Pagett, Dawn Prestwich, Paul Rigby, John Singleton
Substitutes:	Councillor Elaine Silverwood for Councillor Maxine Chew Councillor Frank Andrews for Councillor John Singleton (20 January meeting)
Other Councillors:	Councillor Elizabeth Oades, Councillor Maxine Chew
Officers:	Phillip Woodward, Clare Platt, Tracy Scholes, Ian Curtis, Darren Bell, David Gillett, Paul O'Donoghue, Christine Miller, Peter Graveson, Lyndsey Lacey, Mike Walker, Mark Wilde, Darius Ward, Allan Oldfield, Andrew Marriott, Joceline Greenaway, Jamie Dixon, Paul Walker, Andrew Dickson, Mark Evans, Annie Womack, Joanna Scott
Members of the Public:	2 Members of the public were in attendance

1. Declarations of interest

Members were reminded that any personal/prejudicial interests should be declared as required by the Council's Code of Conduct adopted in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000. A number of members declared an interest as a consequence of their involvement in local 'Friends' groups.

2. Confirmation of minutes

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the Community Focus Scrutiny Committee held on 2 December 2010 as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

3. Substitute members

The following substitution was reported under Council procedure rule 22.3:

Councillor Elaine Silverwood for Councillor Maxine Chew (all three meetings)

Councillor Frank Andrews for Councillor John Singleton (at the 20th January meeting)

4. Budget Preparation

Further to the committee's consideration of the Council's medium term financial forecast and its instruction at the last meeting to scrutinise and review the budget preparations, Joanna Scott (Section 151 Officer) presented an overview of the current financial situation. In doing so, she made reference to the Government's announcement in December of its grant settlement and the consequential need for the Council to identify cost reductions of £4m during the next four years. Mrs Scott explained that savings (or additional income) of £1.2m by end of 2012/13 rising to £1.8m by end of 2014/15 would need to be implemented in order to ensure that the Council remained financially viable during the life of the forecast.

In her report, Mrs Scott presented a summary of the key areas of the Council's expenditure which included the latest 5 year forecast and a summary of budget trends 2007-2010. In addition, she highlighted the forecast risks and assumptions, work undertaken by Management Team in planning for projected budget cuts together with details of important considerations for members in debating the issue.

Mrs Scott stated that the job of balancing the budget over the period of the forecast was made that much harder by the fact that the Council had already delivered significant savings during the last three years. However, the Council was under a legal duty to agree and set a balanced budget

As part of the exercise, members were asked to explore by Directorate statutory and non-statutory services and make any observations to Cabinet where it was felt that service reductions could be made or additional income generated. Supplementary information relating to each cost centre was circulated at the meeting and this was presented in a "musts coulds and shoulds" format i.e. services that are deemed statutory and those that the Council had some choice over whether it provided or not.

Further to the above, the Chief Executive (Phillip Woodward) highlighted a number of specific corporate issues that were either 'work in progress' or could be pursued to mitigate service reductions.

The information on the detailed budget/savings options was presented on a service directorate basis at two meetings 19 January meeting (Community Services Directorate and Government and Partnerships Directorate) and 20 January meeting (Customer and Operational Services Directorate and Strategic Development Services Directorate). The detailed debate on recommendations for Cabinet was undertaken at the meeting on 26 January.

Members were advised that a public consultation exercise had been undertaken during December and January through the Council's website and through Fylde Matters and the feedback from this would be reported to Cabinet in February when it needed to develop recommendations on the 2011/12 budget (and over the medium term) in advance of the Council budget setting meeting on 2nd March.

At the meeting on the 26th the committee was provided with further exemplification of the possible level of savings that might be associated with the corporate issues and 'work in progress' referred to above. Consideration of this additional information was used to determine the scope of the recommendations to be made by the Committee to Cabinet on budget proposals for 2011 onwards.

Members sought clarification during the three meetings on a variety of budget areas highlighted in the agenda papers and the supplementary documents that were circulated. All of the Council's Heads of Service and Directors attended the Committee to respond to questions on their budget responsibilities and to explain the potential impacts of any service reductions.

Following detailed and comprehensive consideration of this matter it was RESOLVED to make the following recommendations to the Cabinet:

1. That the resources allocated to dog control should be retained but reviewed and re-focussed on enforcement activity;
2. That the cost of the Council's management arrangements should be reviewed;
3. That the Member's Allowances scheme should be reviewed with particular reference to the level of special responsibility allowances, the role of Member Champion and the level of travel expenses paid for official duties;
4. That the resources allocated to public relations and the production of the Council's quarterly newsletter (Fylde Matters) be considered for reduction;
5. That all attempts be made to ensure that the pest control service performs at least at a financially 'break-even' position and that the grounds maintenance service be encouraged to build on its recent successes in gaining external business;

6. That an assessment be carried out to evaluate whether the Member's Allowances scheme could be linked more to the actual attendance of Members at committee & other official meetings;
7. That consideration be given to reducing budgets for Mayoral civic entertainment;
8. That consideration be given to reducing the funding for the FLoWE initiative;
9. That the Council's directors be asked to consider a voluntary 5% reduction in remuneration;
10. That any operational areas which are affected by seasonal variations in workloads or work patterns should be assessed for the possibility of introducing annualised or other flexible working hours;
11. That the filming and webcasting of Council and Cabinet meetings be reconsidered as a potential budget saving for the Council;
12. That every endeavour be made to ensure that any redundancies arising out of pending budget rationalisation be secured on a voluntary basis;
13. That the Cabinet ensure that due regard is paid to the feedback on budget matters received in response to the recent public consultation exercise when making that budget recommendations to Council.
