

FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (SPECIAL)

28th January 2008

**PRESENT:-**

**Conservative Group**

Councillor Wheeler (Vice-Chairman in the Chair) and Councillors Bladen, Mrs. Coyle, Ford and Mrs. Wheeler.

**Labour Group**

Councillors Mrs. Lane, Pabla, Richards and Taylor.

**In Attendance**

Councillors Jones and Lemmon (Conservative Group).

**Consultees**

Mrs. C. Hempson (East Midlands Airport), Mr. N. Chischniak (Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce), Mr. G. Royall (South Derbyshire Citizens Advice Bureau), Mrs. J. Smith (South Derbyshire CVS), Reverend B. Hollins (Swadlincote Council of Churches), Mrs. H. Lidgett (Derbyshire Rural Community Council) and Councillor Mrs. G. Farrington (Swadlincote 50+ Forum).

**APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Harrison (Chairman) (Conservative Group).

Apologies were also received from the following consultees:

Mr. B. Wood (Derbyshire Association of Local Councils), Chief Superintendent J Russell (Derbyshire Constabulary), Mr. K Mistry (Derby Racial Equality Council), Dr. A. Wakeman (Director of Public Health, Derby City PCT), Mr. R. Tobias (East Midlands Development Agency), Mrs. M. Alsop (Learning and Skills Council), Mrs. S. Churchill (National Forest Company) and Mr. S. Tullet (South Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce).

**MATTER DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE**

FM/106. **CONSOLIDATED BUDGET PROPOSALS 2008/09 AND FINANCIAL PLAN TO 2013 - CONSULTATION ON THE COUNCIL'S BUDGET**

A copy of the report considered by the Finance and Management Committee at its Special Meeting on 17th January 2008 had been circulated to all Members of the Committee and to consultees. This concerned the Consolidated Budget Proposals for 2008/09 and the Financial Plan to 2013.

A presentation was made by Mrs. J. Jones, Director of Corporate Services and Mr. K Stackhouse, Head of Finance and Property Services at the District Council. Initially, the Director referred to the Consultation on the Corporate Plan for the period 2008/11. She explained the purpose of this consultation, to inform and consult with local people, partners and the business community, on the draft key priorities and actions in the Corporate Plan and the Council's financial position and budget proposals for 2008/09. A copy of the Corporate Plan had been circulated together with a questionnaire to seek feedback. Consultees were urged to complete and return this by 10th February 2008. The Director then explained the Council's vision and its six Corporate Plan themes, which had emerged from extensive consultation with the community and other stakeholders previously. Each year, the Council developed Corporate Plan priorities and actions for each of the themes and feedback was sought.

The Head of Finance and Property Services then spoke about the Council's budget proposals. Information was provided on Council Tax and the sources of funding. He explained how resources were spent on Environmental Services, Community Services and Corporate Services. He referred to the budget proposals for 2008/09, the cost pressures that the Council was facing and the overall positive financial position of the District Council. In particular, the Council had a minimal amount of debt and its investments were earning interest. There were ongoing efficiency savings, good partnership working and the Council was good at attracting external funding.

The Officer then referred those present to the detail of the circulated report. He highlighted the deficit projections and the impact on balance levels. However, there were plans in place and through efficiencies, it meant that the funding deficit closed over future years.

Questions were invited. Mrs. Smith of the South Derbyshire Council for Voluntary Services (SDCVS) noted the additional resources for voluntary sector support. She questioned how this equated to population growth and stated that the Council should not underestimate the call on the voluntary and community sector. In response, the Chairman referred to the work of the Community Partnership Scheme. The Director of Corporate Services confirmed that the Government's grant settlement reflected the growth in South Derbyshire's population. She gave an outline of the other pressures that a growing population created, using refuse collection as an example. When efficiency savings were realised, these were directed to the priority areas.

Mrs. Hempson of East Midlands Airport referred to the Concessionary Travel Scheme and she questioned how many eligible residents there were within the District. Further information was provided on the Scheme, that costs were incurred where the journey commenced from, rather than where the person lived. The Government had undertaken a National assessment of

bus journeys and the level of grants received by local authorities reflected this. The Council would have a better indication on the sufficiency of this grant in future years.

Mr. Chischniak submitted a question about police efficiency savings. Whilst the Council worked in partnership with the Constabulary, such financial aspects would need to be directed to the Police Authority.

Note: At 6.00 p.m. Councillors Richards and Mrs. Coyle joined the Meeting.

Mrs. Lidgett of the Derbyshire Rural Community Council (DRCC) referred to the Rural Access Partnership and she asked how the Council had taken this into account in the budget process. The Director of Corporate Services explained plans for a Peripatetic Visiting Officer. The Council would welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with the DRCC. She explained the work with the SDCVS to access “hard to reach” groups. Mrs. Lidgett presumed that village halls would be used as the venue for outreach sessions, but she explained the need for a private room for people to speak in confidence. She confirmed the DRCC was happy to work with the Council on this issue.

Rvd. Hollins enquired about the availability of funding to support people suffering from substance abuse. Historically, the Council had secured external funding for dedicated posts, on a temporary basis. The Council had now allocated £30,000 to fund a specialist Officer post and it was hoped that efficiency savings elsewhere would enable this post to become permanent.

Mr. Chischniak referred to the National Pay and Grading Review. He questioned how the District Council would manage this process and further information was duly provided. Mr. Chischniak then asked about the identified budget deficit and how the trend for expenditure to be higher than income would be addressed. The Council used a 5-year budgeting approach to ensure that its general reserves were maintained at a minimum level of £1 million. A prudent approach was taken, which gave time to address issues as they arose. Mrs. Hempson questioned whether the trend for reducing balances was likely to continue. The Chairman and the Director of Corporate Services provided further information. For the current 5-year period, a surplus had been identified, which meant that some service development proposals could be allowed. However, there was a need for a careful approach to longer-term commitments, because of the impact on reserves.

R. WHEELER

CHAIRMAN

The Meeting terminated at 6.20 p.m.