

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2012/13 TO 2015/16 –
TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP
1st December, 2011**

PRESENT – Councillors Cossins, Harman, L. Hughes, Lawton, Long and E.A Richmond.

OFFICERS – Elizabeth Davison, Assistant Director, Finance; Steve Petch, Head of Place, Strategy and Commissioning; David Grievson, Finance Manager; and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Carson and Lewis.

Purpose of the Meeting – To scope the relevant section of the Cabinet report on the medium term financial plan (MTFP) under the remit of Place Scrutiny Committee. The Group were advised that further meetings would be held to look at the issues raised in more detail and also to consider the Vision for the Arts.

Points Discussed and Considered -

The Assistant Director, Finance advised the Group that the Council's Business Model was based around three central questions – What services the Council will provide; How are the services delivered; and Who will provide those services. An overview was then given of the budget proposals contained in the MTFP 2012/13 to 2015/16, relevant to this Scrutiny Committee, the future impact on the services faced with budget savings (Appendix 14) and the detailed proposals (Appendix 15). Following a Member question clarification was given in relation to Car Parking Charges and Supported Bus Services.

Members gave consideration to Appendix 12 which identified all services provided by the Council split into three categories, AM – Absolute Minimum service level to meet statutory requirements and to make an impact; AV1 – Added Value services beyond AM; and AV2 – Added Value services beyond AM and AV1.

Discussion ensued on the impact on safety due to a reduction in school crossing patrol services; alternative funding for the provision of CCTV; alternative approaches to cost savings for street lighting; civil contingencies budget; working arrangements with regard to business engagement; and potential impact on floral displays in South Park and staffing implications within grounds maintenance.

With regard to the Dolphin Centre and Stressholme Golf Club the Group questioned if there were alternative means of making savings or earning more and requested information on earnings targets of both premises. The Group also requested information relating to alternative models of management for the Civic Theatre and an explanation of how the £100k budget for the Events and Outreach Programme related to the Vision for the Arts.

Finally Members gave consideration to the Trading Standards Service and requested further detailed information relating to Cockerton Library.

IT WAS AGREED – (b) That relevant Officers be invited to the meeting of this Group scheduled for 9th December to provide information on :-

- (a) School Crossing Patrols – Has the impact on safety in reducing the service been considered; have potential alternatives been considered i.e. volunteers and puffin crossings; and can a breakdown of the £105,000 be provided?
 - (b) CCTV – Has alternative funding been considered by local groups or the Police; can dummy cameras be maintained and do they have any effect, were are the cuts planned?
 - (c) Street Lighting – Has any work been undertaken on alternative approaches to cost savings? Can members see the reports and has any work been done?
 - (d) Civil Contingencies – Can a breakdown of the £87,000 be provided?
 - (e) Business Engagement – Is the Council working smartly? Are we working jointly with other Local Authorities? Can a breakdown of the £313,000 budget be provided?
 - (f) Grounds Maintenance – What is the potential impact on floral displays in South Park? Are there any staffing implications? What will happen to the birds in the Aviary?
 - (g) Dolphin Centre – Are there other means of making savings or earning more? Have the earnings targets been reviewed? Can information relating to the catering business plan be provided i.e. cost input and output figures?
 - (h) Stressholme Golf Club – As above.
 - (i) Civic Theatre – Have alternative methods of management been considered? Has a business approach been taken to managing the theatre?
 - (j) Events and Outreach Programme – Can Officers explain how the £100,000 budget relates to Vision for the Arts?
 - (k) Trading Standards – Could this service be shared with other Local Authorities?
 - (l) Cockerton Library – Have alternatives to closure been considered i.e. combining with other organisations, sponsorship, funding from academies and Job Centre Plus? Could the opening hours be reduced? Can volunteers be used? Can details be provided of any previous considerations by Officers in recent years of alternative patterns of service? Can the Equalities Impact Assessment be made available to Members?
- (b) That should Members have any further questions they be directed to the Democratic Officer.

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9th December, 2011

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2012/13 TO 2015/16 –
TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP

PRESENT – Councillors Carson, Cossins, Grundy, Harman, Lawton and Long.

OFFICERS – Elizabeth Davison, Assistant Director, Finance; Steve Petch, Head of Place, Strategy and Commissioning; Dave Winstanley, Assistant Director Highways, Design and Projects; Ian Thompson, Assistant Director, Community Services; John Anderson, Assistant Director - Policy and Regeneration; Mike Crawshaw, Cultural Services Manager; David Grievson, Finance Manager; and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Baldwin, L. Hughes, Lewis, E.A Richmond and Wright.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE - Councillors Francis, Kelley, Lee, D.A. Lyonette, H. Scott and Wallis.

The Chair, Councillor Long, advised the Group that Councillor Coultas was no longer a Member of Place Scrutiny Committee and requested that the thanks of Scrutiny Committee be conveyed to him for his valuable input as a Place Scrutiny Committee Member. Councillor Grundy was welcomed to the Committee to the Review Group, as a new Member of Place Scrutiny Committee.

Purpose of the Meeting – The give consideration to the issues raised following the scoping of the MTFP on 1st December 2011 by this Review Group.

Points Discussed and Considered -

At its meeting on 1st December, 2011 this Review Group scoped the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) within the remit of Place Scrutiny Committee and requested further information on various issues and topics.

Darlington Library Service - With regard to the Options for Darlington Library Services, Officers confirmed that there was no statutory minimum for library provision but it was assessed on local need, demographics and geography of the area. As 27% of loans were from Cockerton Library the Authority would be challenged to continue to provide the service through Crown Street and the Mobile Library. Members expressed concerns that by closing Cockerton Library the unemployed would suffer digital and social exclusion as many used the library IT services especially as Job Centre Plus required all job applications to be made on line. It was suggested that schools be approached to contribute towards the running costs of Cockerton Library as many schoolchildren used the service on a regular basis. The Cabinet Member with the Portfolio for Leisure and Local Environment advised the Group that a vast amount of thorough and detailed work had been undertaken over the whole of the library service, a public meeting to consider the proposals would be held on 15th December and the Council was prepared to listen to any comments and/or suggestions made. Concerns were expressed at the lack of library services per head within the Borough compared to other comparative authorities and that the service had also contributed to previous year's savings.

Assurances were asked for on the undertaking of a thorough equalities risk appraisal to avoid a judicial review recently experienced by another authority, distances to another library service and the amount of outlets within the Borough. Officers confirmed that over the previous two years there had been a flexible re-thinking of the current services which had had staffing implications and that a library service run by volunteers would need professional supervision. It was confirmed that the house-bound service provided from Crown Street Library would continue; a shared Shared Library Management Service was currently being investigated and that following investigations it was felt that there would be no market for a café within the Crown Street Library although this could be explored in Cockerton. Officers again reiterated that the immediate financial imperative was to deliver a service within a shrinking budget whilst undertaking a transformation of the Library Service.

Officers also confirmed that negotiations were on-going with Darlington Media Group (DMG) for alternative accommodation, one of which was Cockerton Library. Members requested that an assessment be undertaken on the effect of Cockerton Library Closure to the surrounding businesses. It was also stated that the Localism Bill encouraged local groups and communities to provide services and as Cockerton Library was on the Asset Register any person or group could make an approach to the Authority if they had the funds.

Street Lighting – The Group were advised that various options were being considered i.e. dimming, metering, switching off during the night, use of LED lights and de-commissioning with a view to having a strategy in place 2012.

Discussion ensued on the risk of anti-social behaviour if lights were switched off, locations being considered and regulations covering the provision of street lighting on A roads.

Grounds Maintenance – The Group were advised that one full-time employee would be lost, more shrubs would be used in displays and that a Friends Group were looking to establish a Trust to look after the Aviary in South Park. A Member asked if there was any merit in changing the criteria for Northumbria in Bloom i.e. purely entering the Town Centre only.

Civil Contingencies – Members were advised that the Council had a Service Level Agreement with Durham County Council and that reductions had been made in last years MTFP.

Business Engagement - This was not a statutory service which was being reduced to an absolute minimum to contribute to economy outcomes. The current team was very imaginative and generated income of £190k into the business support arena.

Trading Standards – A feasibility study had been undertaken which had determined that a shared service was not feasible. A staffing restructure had recently been undertaken and was working well.

Increase Planning Fees – Legislation was due in January 2012 for Local Authorities to set their own planning fees and investigations were currently being undertaken to establish if pre-planning fees could be an option.

Local Agenda 21 – Members accepted this proposal as the Green Network would undertake any issues.

Supported Bus Services – Commercial bus operators were to lose Government funding and some services would be lost, it was therefore suggested that buses operate a lower level of service mainly at peak times.

Indoor Bowls – As Darlington Indoor Bowls Club was now in a stronger financial position with 400+ members the grant was to be reduced over the following two year period. Members were advised that Officers were working with the club on a Lottery Grant application for replacement carpet.

CCTV Provision – Members expressed concerns at reducing the CCTV service and were advised that provision of dummy cameras also bore a cost. The Police were looking into funding opportunities for any cameras which the Council were proposing to turn off that they deemed necessary. Members requested the locations of the proposed camera cuts.

Dolphin Centre Closure – The Group were advised that the Dolphin Centre had endured many cuts over previous years and in order to maintain the service Bank Holiday closures were necessary, however reduced hours also incurred reduced income. The next step was total closure with massive staffing implications. There were further proposals to look at management and governance in order to achieve possible £300k savings.

Events Team – It was agreed to defer this item to the meeting scheduled for 14th December, 2011.

Highways and Footway Maintenance – There was a proposed 5% reduction on budgets however most investment was from Local Transport Plan and capital funding.

Traffic Management – This service was already performing on the bare minimum road safety regulatory needs.

Parking Message System – Members were advised that this was very costly to maintain and therefore it was proposed to decommission the real time variable message parking guidance system which could have an impact on traffic congestion around the Town.

School Crossing Patrol Service – Members were advised that it was proposed to undertake feasibility work to investigate providing the service in alternative ways – not to lose the service. A saving would be achieved if the feasibility worked in favour.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That schools and Job Centre Plus be approached to determine if a contribution to the Library Service could be made.

(b) That Legal Services be requested to confirm that the Assessment of Local Need had been undertaken correctly.

(c) That a further equalities risk assessment be made in relation to unemployed and low income people (Appendix 19/15 of the submitted report) in relation to social and digital exclusion.

(d) That the following governance options be pursued :-

- The Council collaborates with a neighbouring Local Authority to develop a joint-service model of delivery;

- The Council supports the establishment of a separate Libraries only company or trust as part of a company structure that secures the financial benefits of charitable status;
- The Council supports the establishment of a wider Leisure and Cultural Trust as part of a company structure that secures the financial benefits of charitable status; and
- The Council considers supporting the establishment of an 'employee-owned'; model, such as a mutual

(e) That Members be forwarded information relating to volunteers providing the library service.

(f) That Community Partnerships and Friends Organisations be approached for assistance in running the Library Service.

(g) That investigations be undertaken on the effect of local businesses if Cockerton Library were closed.

(h) That the reduction in criteria for Northumbria in Bloom be investigated.

(i) That Members be circulated a list of the CCTV cameras to be turned off.

(j) That the item in relation to the Events Team be adjourned to the meeting scheduled for 14th December, 2011.

(k) That Offices be thanked for clarifying the issues raised in relation to the MTFP.

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14th December, 2011

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2012/13 TO 2015/16 –
TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP

PRESENT – Councillors Carson, Harman, Lawton, Long and E.A. Richmond.

OFFICERS – Richard Alty, Director of Place; Elizabeth Davison, Assistant Director, Finance; Steve Petch, Head of Place, Strategy and Commissioning; Mike Crawshaw, Cultural Services Manager; David Grievson, Finance Manager; and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Cossins and Lewis.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE - Councillors Kelly and Wallis.

Purpose of the Meeting – To give consideration to the Vision for the Arts following the scoping of the MTFP on 1st December 2011 by this Review Group.

Points Discussed and Considered -

At its meeting on 1st December, 2011 this Review Group scoped the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) within the remit of Place Scrutiny Committee and requested further information relating to the Vision for the Arts. The Group had been encouraged to submit any questions or concerns it had and these were addressed below :-

- Members raised concerns as to the costs associated with maintaining and cleaning of the Arts Centre building and questioned if the service could be provided cheaper from another supplier;
- An explanation was given of the ticket information and advertising and marketing costs within the budget for the Arts Centre which came from a central budget and was divided for the Arts venues;
- The Group were advised that contingency plans were in place, if closure were to happen in July 2012, for storage of the Borough Collection, storing/disposal/rehousing of the etching machine which was possibly valuable, Victorian and the only one in the north east still in use; future of the sculpture; and the salvage of the oak staircase;
- With regard to the Steinway piano bought by public subscription negotiations were underway with several music societies;
- It was confirmed that the Arts Centre was not a listed building although it was in a Conservation Area and if it were to be sold and demolished then a replacement building would need to be as good or a better contribution to the area;
- A development brief had been prepared if conversion and selective demolition was to be considered;

- With regard to the provision of a new Arts Hub members were advised that all opportunities for external funding would be explored and that the two main opportunities were from Capital Receipt and a recent bid submission to Arts Council England for £3m which was based on selling the Arts Centre for £2.5m, ring-fencing that money for Arts use, £1.5m will be for the provision of a new Arts building and £1m for the revenue stream of the Arts Centre. Beaumont Street Park was the indicated site for a new Arts Building. A decision on Phase 1 of the submission was expected on 1st April, 2012 and Phase 2 decision eighteen months later.;
- It was intended to have a performance based theatre with capacity for 200 and a community based multi-used area for a broad range of arts activity including children and young people's theatre areas, some exhibition space and an outdoor performance area, it was estimated that the running costs of the facility would be £180k to £200k per year.
- The Group were advised that it was vital that the new building was flexible for Arts provision, not just for children and young people, but a bid to the Arts Council could only be made if Theatre Hullabaloo were involved;
- Members referred to the Governance arrangements which were outlined on Page 231 of the MTFP document previously circulated and questions were raised as to why there was not direct Arts Management by the Local Authority. It was confirmed that the findings of the Enquiry Group had highlighted three foundations stones to be built into the options which were an Arts Hub, Children and Young People's Theatre and a Strategic Function to drive the cycle of art development by working with arts organisations and other partners;
- A Member suggested that the Arts Centre Building be used as a Resource Centre which would attract more funding although the Group were reminded that footfall would be required to cover the significant basic premises costs;
- Another suggestion was to use the Council Chamber and the space below as they were underused and benefits were that it was central, Arts Centre money could be used to refurbish the area and resources such as light, heat and outdoor space were currently available;
- Officers confirmed that they would investigate the idea although reminded the Group that plans were abandoned to turn the Council Chamber into a multi-use area several years ago;
- A Member requested clarification of Appendix 15/36 relating to the Events Team within the budget savings proposals. Clarification was given.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the Officers be thanked for their detailed response to any questions raised by this Group on the Vision for the Arts.

(b) That the findings of this Group be forwarded to a Special meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 12th January, 2012 and any recommendations therefrom will be submitted to the Special Meeting of Resources scheduled for 26th January, 2012.

