

**Report by the Director of Resources**

**State of the District Forum - Budget Consultation 2008/2009**

**1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 To receive and discuss any comments received from the Budget Consultation which took place during the autumn and the results of the State of the District Forum held in Southwick on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007.

**2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Policy and Strategy Committee is recommended:-
- (a) to note the comments received from the public Budget Consultation, and to decide if any action is required in the light of those comments;
  - (b) to note the summary of the results from the State of the District Forum held in Southwick on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007, and to take these into account in making recommendations on the budget for 2008/09 to the Council on the 18<sup>th</sup> February 2008.

**3.0 Background**

- 3.1 The Council has undertaken various forms of public consultation over the years with varying degrees of success. In 2006/07, the exercise for the General Fund was based specifically on the impact of the funding for the revised Concessionary Fares Scheme and was conducted through Adur Outlook. In the report on the Budget Strategy considered by Members in late July 2007, it was suggested that it would be appropriate to retain consultation in the budget strategy as best practice in consulting the public about tax and spending decisions.
- 3.2 The Committee considered the various options outlined in the report and decided against using the Residents Panel, but to use Adur Outlook and some form of public meeting. It was agreed that this would form part of the State of the District Debate, which is also now an established event which allows issues arising to be considered within the budget setting process.
- 3.3 As in previous years, the Adur Consultative Forum (ACF) has been involved in considering the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and setting the rents. Officers have attended a meeting of the ACF prior to the Housing and Central Services Committee to discuss the proposed Housing Revenue Account, and to consult with the ACF on the proposed level of rent increase.

3.4 In the update report on the budget which was considered by this Committee on the 11<sup>th</sup> December last, Members considered whether any response was required to the provisional local government finance settlement which had been announced on the 6<sup>th</sup> December. The final settlement figures are likely to be announced sometime in the period mid to late January 2008 following the close of the consultation period which ended on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 2008.

3.5 The Committee agreed the following:

- ◆ that the Council continue to lobby for an adequate and equitable distribution of the grant to fund the national scheme for free off-peak bus travel in April 2008;
- ◆ that the Director of Resources and the Leader of the Council respond robustly to any consultation.

3.6 In response to those resolutions the Leader of the Council sent a letter directly to the Prime Minister in December in which the Leader made it quite clear that although the council is fully in favour of the national concessionary travel scheme it should be funded fully and fairly. The Leader emphasised that the council wants pound for pound spent on free travel to be reimbursed back to local authorities. The leader also commented that “We plan to continue to lobby the government and urge them to reconsider the arrangements they have for funding this service. If it hadn’t been for this we could have been looking at a possible 0 per cent increase in council tax.”

3.7 In response to the Local Government Minister’s offer for local authorities to meet with him during the consultation period on the local government finance settlement for 2008/09, a delegation of council leaders, officers and MPs went to Westminster to lobby the minister John Healey on Friday 28th December 2007. Adur District Council, Worthing Borough Council and Brighton & Hove City Council arranged a joint meeting in the hope of persuading the minister to rethink the way free bus travel for people aged 60 and over is funded. All three councils face serious financial strain under the present unfair system of local government grant allocation.

#### **4.0 Response to the Consultation**

4.1 **Adur Outlook** – A full page insert in the October edition of Adur Outlook generated three responses which are shown in Appendix B. These have been acknowledged but no detailed reply has been supplied to date. In summary, the respondents raised the following points:

- ◆ Examine property records and usage to ensure correct taxation applies;
- ◆ Remove officers ability to assist local organisations and causes in a voluntary capacity;
- ◆ Concern about Central Government control and allocation of funds to local authorities;
- ◆ A number of specific issues relating spending on local authority core business.

In terms of having a direct impact on the 2008/09 budget, Members should note these comments and advise whether there are any specific actions required on any of the points raised.

#### **4.2 State of the District Forum held in Southwick on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007 -**

- (a) Notice of the State of the District Forum was given on the Council's website and published in the local press prior to the event. 1458 personal invitations to attend the forum were sent stakeholders, including local business representatives, and Viewpoint Panel members. The public were informed through two press advertisements placed near to the date of the forum.
- (b) Qualitative consultation was undertaken at the State of the District Forum, which took place at the Barn, Southwick between 7:00 PM and 8:00 PM on Thursday, 22<sup>nd</sup> November. This was attended by 36 members of the public, 11 Members and a number of Officers. Consultation was undertaken by way of an opening presentation by the Director of Resources followed by each table of up to 8 people having 45 minutes to review a list of Adur council services and to place them into three categories:
  - (i) services deemed to be of a higher priority or where more resources should be allocated:
  - (ii) services which are important to the community and on which spending is about right:
  - (iii) services deemed to be of a lower priority or where less resources might be allocated.
- (c) Each table was asked to identify which category each of the existing services should be placed in and these have been summarised for each table. The results are shown in Appendix C. Clearly there are some common strands flowing from the exercise, but also some very mixed messages. Members should take these results as being a snapshot of opinion from those attending on the night, and should be careful not to draw too many firm conclusions from the information contained in the appendix, as those views cannot be taken as wholly representative.

**4.3 Letter to the Prime Minister** – The Council has received a response from the Prime Minister's Office, indicating that the matter has been referred to the Department for Transport for reply.

#### **4.4 Meeting with the local government minister, John Healey, on Friday 28th December 2007**

- (a) The delegation from the three Councils in Sussex met with local government minister John Healey in London to outline their fears about the impact the cost of the scheme for free bus travel for people aged 60 and over was having. The delegation comprised Adur and Worthing MPs Tim Loughton and Peter Bottomley, who were joined by Brighton and Hove Finance Committee Chair Ann Norman and the city's Finance Director Catherine Vaughan, together with Adur District Council Leader Neil Parkin, Worthing Borough Council Deputy Leader Ann Barlow and Worthing and Adur Chief Executive Ian Lowrie.

- (b) The meeting, which had been arranged to enable the representatives of the three Councils to raise concerns about the level of funding caused by the introduction of the national concessionary bus fare scheme for pensioners, has been described by those attending as 'constructive'. Mr Healey was told how Adur, Worthing and Brighton faced significant shortfalls in funding when the new nationwide scheme comes into operation in April. However there has been a well above average uptake by pensioners on the Sussex coastal strip and the costs of travel are relatively higher in the area which has meant council taxpayers have effectively been subsidising the scheme since it was introduced. Mr Healey said he was grateful for the opportunity to hear the problems first-hand and promised to take up the points raised by the delegation.

## **5.0 Conclusions**

- 5.1 The shortfall in funding for concessionary bus travel and the impact of a "tight" Revenue Support Grant Settlement have left the Council facing a difficult budget scenario for 2008/09. After much hard work, a balanced budget with a reasonable increase in Council Tax is likely to be recommended to the Council. Some difficult decisions have been made, and further spending pressures exist, but the recommended budget for next year does not contain any significant proposals for cuts in front-line services. The likely increase in council tax will also be within the limit which will be used by Central Government to cap authorities in 2008/09. See report later on the Committee's agenda.
- 5.2 The consultation exercise, although not hugely supported, has provided the Council with some views on where to focus its resources in the future. The Council appreciates the trouble taken by those who have responded, either directly, or through attendance at the forum, and will use those views in future discussions on spending priorities.

## **Local Government Act 1972**

### **Background Papers:**

### **Contact Officers:**

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## **Appendix A**

### **1.0 Council Priority**

1.1 The following priorities apply:

Protect and enhance core services to the community  
Keep Council Tax increases to the minimum level practicable

### **2.0 Specific Targets**

2.1 **(A)** All targets will be affected by the resources allocated to each service or activity  
**(B)** Matter considered and apart from targets included in Best Value Performance Plan there are no other targets involved.

### **3.0 Sustainability Issues**

3.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

### **4.0 Equality Issues**

4.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

### **5.0 Community Safety issues (Section 17)**

5.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

### **6.0 Human Rights Issues**

6.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

### **7.0 Financial Implications**

7.1 Details of proposed levels of council tax, capital and revenue spending commitments, risks and future budget pressures will be considered as part of the overall budget report, including possible commitments and time spans.

### **8.0 Legal Implications**

8.1 These issues will be affected by the resources allocated to each service or activity.

### **9.0 Consultations**

9.1 The report focuses on the consultation which has taken place during the preparation of the 2008/09 budget and all issues are as outlined in the report.

### **10.0 Risk assessment**

10.1 There are risks to the budget involved in provision of any service, but particularly where other partners are involved. These have been identified and will be managed accordingly.

## **11.0 Health & Safety Issues**

11.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

## **12.0 Procurement Strategy**

12.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

## **13.0 Partnership working**

13.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

**BUDGET CONSULTATION RESPONSES      Appendix B**

<p>A H Pude Lancing</p>	<p>Identify properties not paying the proper Council Tax – namely the myriad of extensions and rooms in the roof over the region. An air survey from Shoreham Airport could be used as a basis to track extensions not having been applied for or been granted Planning Permission. Another suggestion is to use council staff to identify the thousands of homes being used for office or service industries when they are really just for living in (or perhaps a whistle-blowers phone line!?)</p>
<p>Alan Dunn (e-mail address supplied)</p>	<p>I was very surprised to see in the latest Adur Outlook that ADC employees were allowed three days off work at the council tax payer's expense to undertake voluntary work in the district. I have no doubt that the work is very worthwhile but it is hardly voluntary as council tax payers are meeting the bill. A quick way to reduce the usual rise in council tax bill by a small amount is to stop this totally unacceptable practice.</p> <p>I do appreciate that the huge rises in Council Tax along with reduced services are imposed on the tax payers of the South East by the current two faced hypocritical labour government taking the tax we pay and using it to bribe those living in the labour heartlands of the north to continue voting for them. ADC and the other councils in the south are not part of the problem but will have to live within the limits imposed until those with sense are able to get rid of 'President' Brown and his labour cohorts.</p>

## BUDGET CONSULTATION RESPONSES

<p>David Williams (e-mail address supplied)</p>	<p>You ask for suggestions as to what you should cut. I do not know which services the Council has to provide on the orders of central government and which are optional. Nor do I know whether the Council is reimbursed for specific services where it is acting as the agent of central government so I can only suggest guidelines.</p> <p>The collection of rubbish is central to a civilised society and nothing in this area should go.</p> <p>Similarly street cleaning and keeping open areas in good order should only be second only to rubbish disposal.</p> <p>Cuts are appropriate in areas that should not be a responsibility of local government at all. The amount of paper generated by previous consultation exercises was alarming. In that an election is itself the product of consultation a further exercise is unnecessary and undesirable.</p> <p>I doubt whether travel subsidy is a proper activity for a local council.</p> <p>A possible test of whether money is being well spent is to ask whether the expenditure concerned will pay for immediate concrete activity or whether it will only pave the way for further talk.</p> <p>Another test would be to ask whether the activity was considered necessary twenty years ago.</p>
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Results of the Budget workshop at the State of the District Forum 22-11-2007

Appendix C

Budget heading	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6	Group 7	Group 8	Clear Majority	WBC
Adur & Worthing Services	M	H	H	M		H	H	H	H	H
Allotments	H	M	L	M		M		M	M	M
Area Investment Framework/Shoreham Renaissance	M	L	M	H		L	M	M	M	M
Beaches and Amenities	H	M	L	M		M	H	H		M
Building control	H	M	M	M		H		M	M	M
Car Parks	M	L	L	L		M	L	M	L	L
CCTV	M	M	L	L		H	M	L		M
Cemeteries and Churchyards	M	H	H	M		M	H	L		L
Collection of Revenues	M	H	H	H		H	H	H	H	M
Community and Health Development	L	H	L	M		M		M	M	H
Community and Welfare Grants	M	H	H	M		H	M	M	M	L
Community Buildings	M	H	H	H		M	L	M		L
Community Planning	L	M	L	H		M	L	M		H
Community Safety	H	H	H	M		H		H	H	M
Concessionary Travel	H	H	H	M		H	H	L	H	H
Council Tax Benefits	M	H	H	H		M	H	H	H	M
Countryside and Open Spaces	M	H	M	M		L	H	H		M
Development control	M	H	M	H		H	H	H	H	H
Dog warden	L	L	L	L		L		M	L	H
Drain Clearing	M	L	M	L		H				L
Economic Regeneration	H	H	M	H		H	M	H	H	M
Economies resulting from the implementation of EDRMS	H	H	L	L		L	H	M		L
Elections	L	M	L	H		L	H	H		L
Environmental health - Commercial	M	M	M	H		M		M	M	H
Environmental health - Domestic	L		M	L		M		L		H
Executive Office	L	L	M	H		L	M	L	L	L
Five Town Centre Network	H	L		L			L	H	L	
General Corporate Management	M	L	M	M		L		M		M
Golden Sands Caravan Park	H	L					L	L	L	
Highways	M	H	L	M		H	M	M	M	M
Home Recycling			H				H			H
Homelessness	M	H	M	M		M		H	M	H
Housing General District	M	H	H	M		M	H	H	H	H
Land Charges	H	H	H	M		L	H	L	H	M

Land Drainage & Coast Protection	H	H	H	M		M	H	H	H	M
Leisure Centres Management	L	M	L	L		L	M	L	L	M
Leisure Development	L	M	H	H		L	L	M	L	M
Licensing	M	H	H	M		M	H	L		M
Member Support	L	H	L	M		M	H	L	L	L
Members Expenses and Allowances	L	L	L	L		L	H	L	L	L
Miscellaneous	L	H	M	M		L	H	L	L	M
Non Distributed Costs	M	H	L	M		L	H	L		L
Parks	M	M	H	M		L	H	H		M
Pest control	L	H	H	M		L		M		L
Planning policy and implementation	M	H	M	H		M	H	H	H	M
Property Management	H	L	M	L		L		M	L	L
Public Toilets	M	H	M	L		H	H	H	H	L
Recreation Grounds	M	M	H	M		L	H	L	M	M
Refuse and Recycling Joint Working	M	M	H	H		H		M	H	H
Refuse Collection		H					H			H
Rent Allowances	M	H	H	M		M	H	M	M	H
Street Sweeping and Other Cleaning	M	H	H	H		H	H	L	H	M
Street Lighting	M	H	H	L		H	H	H	H	L
Streetscene	L		M	H		L	L	M		L
Supporting People	H	H					L	L		
Sustainable Development	M	H	M	M		H	H	H	H	H
Trade Refuse	H	L	L	L		L	L	L	L	L
Transportation	M	M	L	L		L	M	M		L
Visual Quality Initiative	M	M	L	H		L	L	L	L	L