

Appendix 7

Consultation and Engagement

Reconciling Policy and Resources

Consultation with Trade Unions 21 January 2016

1.1 A meeting was held with Trade Union representatives on 21 January 2016. The Leader thanked the representatives for attending, and through them the County Council's staff.

1.2 The Chief Executive set out that the County Council remained a large employer, with an estimated annual spend of £350m. Since the original budget proposals were announced in October there has been extensive work in response to the provisional budget settlement from central Government, leading to proposals mitigating the savings required in Adult Social Care by £1.9m.

1.3 The Trade Union representatives raised a number of issues which were addressed as set out below.

Income generation

1.4 The Lead Member for Resources set out that the County Council was committed to exploring ideas for generating income with a cross-party Income Generation Board. Some proposals have developed from staff suggestions, but each proposal has to be supported by a sound business case for viability and payback period. There is a proposal coming forward for some County Council buildings to have solar panels, which has been developed from the proposal that closed landfill sites be used for energy generation, which proved unviable.

Pothole repairs

1.5 The Lead Member for Transport and Environment set out that potholes repairs had been funded from a variety of sources, including central Government grants, in response to four consecutive wet winters, and long-term investment through the capital programme, as an invest to save measure. There were tangible benefits to the programme of repairs in line with the current intervention criteria, as reported to the Economy, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Committee.

Bexhill Hastings Link Road

1.6 The Director of Communities, Economy and Transport set out that the overspend on Coombe Valley Way has been attributable in part to adverse weather conditions during the construction period (including the wettest winter recorded since 1776), and the extensive archaeology uncovered which is of international importance. The Way should be seen as a path to prosperity in its effects in job creation and unlocking land to meet housing need, and in generating £1bn in gross value added of benefits in a deprived area of the county.

Consultants

1.7 The Chief Operating Officer set out that there was a council-wide methodology for the management, monitoring and delivery of programmes and projects. The Council has a new supplier for interim and agency staff and activity is reported annually to Scrutiny Committee in order to give transparency to activity and reasons for using interim or agency staff. Procurement Standing Orders are in place that set the procurement requirements and standards that have to be applied. It is important to recognise that some use of specialist external staff, particularly during large-scale change programmes, is unavoidable, but the Council is committed to the development and training of staff to enable them to achieve their full potential. The Lead Member for Resources highlighted the Ingenium initiative which show cased up and coming talent in the workforce. Out of this a number of ideas from staff are being developed and as an example a project developed by staff to create CVs to inform managers of the skills available within their teams.

Music Service

1.8 The Director of Children's Services, in response to a query regarding the financing of the Music Service, set out that County Council was not in a position to direct how schools use their pupil premium, but was in a position to advise them of the Music Service's offer and that the premium could be used to purchase those services. The direction of travel for the Music Service is for it to be self-funding from government grants and fee income.

Support for young people and home to school transport

1.9 The Lead Member for Learning and School Effectiveness set out the background to the decision taken in November to review the Council's discretionary spending on home to school transport. The importance of access to the Further Education offers at the County's providers, and the risk of young people becoming NEET, was acknowledged. A wide-scale review of Further Education provision (including West Sussex and Brighton & Hove) was highlighted.

1.10 The Director for Children's Services explained that 25% of the savings achieved in the course of the review of discretionary spend had been recycled into bursaries available to those colleges with the highest proportion of low income families. In respect of the support for young people, the Director set out that by reducing the universal offer provisions the Department was able to restrict reductions in some services targeted at the most vulnerable to below 15%.

ISEND

1.11 The Director of Children's Services set out that the Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability service had been the subject of great changes. He stressed that the service was always looking for ways to improve, and that if staff had concerns regarding any administrative burden incurred through the traded services system it would be explored. He further set out that the conversion rate of Statements of SEN to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHP) would be increased, and that the greater savings were scheduled for later years in the MTFP.

1.12 In response to a query about traded services, the Director of Children's Services set out that schools had access to a core offer and a number of supplementary services which they could purchase, aimed at reducing the risk of children being placed outside local authority provision. With regard to ECHPs the expectation is for more children to be accommodated within local schools which will result in less money being spent on independent special schools.

IT Provision

1.13 The Chief Operating Officer, in response to a query regarding the state of the Council's IT infrastructure, set out that the key consideration was the return on the Council's investment. The performance of the Helpdesk Team, access to which was highlighted as a particular concern, is monitored. In response to a common Helpdesk request, investment in an automatic password resetting programme was being evaluated. The Leader and Deputy Leader both highlighted that they had been operating paperlessly for two years.

Supply teachers

1.14 The Director of Children's Services explained that the County Council was not in a position to maintain a bank of supply teachers, and that how schools spent their budgets, whether they chose to engage agencies to provide supply staff or make their own arrangements, was up to them. Schools were encouraged by the Council to make full use of the established Education Improvement Partnerships.

National Living Wage

1.15 The Interim Assistant Director – Personnel and Training set out that a benchmarking exercise had been undertaken with regard to implementation of the NLW and our neighbours, which had revealed that East Sussex was broadly comparable. It was confirmed that there was no intention to implement the Foundation Living Wage.

Lobbying

1.16 The Leader highlighted the work he and the other Members of the Council did in lobbying, both directly in the form of his letter to the Prime Minister and meetings with Government representatives, and indirectly through the LGA and CCN. It was recognised that these efforts may not necessarily bear immediate fruit, but it was hoped that there might be an impact in future settlements.

Job loses

1.17 It was confirmed that the County Council was aware of the impact of savings on staff and remained committed to minimising compulsory redundancies and would continue to apply the full range of agreed employment policies including seeking redeployment opportunities wherever possible, which had proved successful last year. Although difficult to confirm until implementation was undertaken, the likely order of reduction in FTE staff was expected to be 100-150.