



Leicester  
City Council

## MINUTE EXTRACT

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
ARTS, LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Held: WEDNESDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2006 at 5.30pm

Adjourned Wednesday 8 February 2006 at 6.00pm  
Reconvened Monday 13 February 2006 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Sandringham - Chair  
Councillor Connelly - Labour Spokesperson  
Councillor Mrs Maw - Conservative Spokesperson

Councillor Henry

Councillor Shelton

Councillor Thompson

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### **37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were requested to declare any interests they had in the business to be discussed and/or indicate that Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 applied to them.

No declarations were made.

### **41. THE REVENUE BUDGET STRATEGY OF REGENERATION AND CULTURE 2006/7 - 2008/9**

The Corporate Director for Regeneration and Culture submitted a report that outlined the Regeneration and Culture Department three-year financial strategy. The Strategy addressed inherited financial issues and incorporated three main routes for delivering both a better service and corporate financial targets and provided for modest growth in some areas. These were maximising income, management and back office staff reductions, and department efficiencies and some service re-configurations.

It was stated that the budget plan was the best possible route for the department under the financial restraints that had been placed upon it from previous years. It was also stated that the budget was based on the assumption that the department would receive corporate support with energy costs and increases in road maintenance and that Government funding would be sufficient to cover transport for elders.

Members expressed concern that the Equalities Impact Assessment just took racial equality into account and suggested that issues of disability and gender impact also needed assessment. In response it was stated that the template used was one that had been supplied to the department as meeting the relevant legal obligations. .

The Chair invited the Committee to comment on each budget proposal in turn.

### **Maximising Income**

It was stated that officers were currently investigating creating income from charging for pre-planning advice for large projects, and advertising on Council land / property in the public sphere. Work was continuing and it was hoped that funding could be accessed within the three year budget timescale.

### **Purchase of Graves and increased crematorium charges**

Serious concern was expressed in regard to the increases in charges which, it was suggested, were a 50% increase in some cases. It was suggested that that these cuts would have a disproportionate affect on some minority groups and though support was available for those on low incomes it would not help people who were just above the relevant thresholds. It was suggested that the Equalities Impact assessment did not make the link between racial and religious groups and so did not reflect the full impact. In response it was stated that the increased charges to burials and cremations were to cover increased pressures of environmental and burial ground costs, and that the equalities impact study highlighted the potential effect on some religious groups in the city. Subsidies were in place for people on low incomes. In response to a query about re-opening church burial land it was stated that such requests had to go through a specific process, which would be examined.

### **Charging for Pre-Planning Advice**

It was acknowledged that these increases would only apply to significant developments.

### **Management and back office restructuring and reductions**

A request was made for further information on how the decision was made to reduce the number of heads of service by seven and whether the proposed change had been identified by consultants or through the budget process. In response it was stated that the re-configuration attempted to ensure greater similarity between jobs classified as 'head of services' and that the changes had been identified as the minimum level at which services could be delivered without affecting service users.

Concern was expressed about how job losses would be implemented and whether the costs of redundancies had been accounted for. In response it was stated that some people would be redeployed whilst others would take redundancy or be made redundant. A figure for the potential costs of redundancies had been identified in appendix 1 of the report.

Members expressed concern that consultants would have to be used to meet workload commitments. In response it was stated that this would not be the

case as where there was no budget the work would not be carried out which also meant that there would be no funds available to employ such consultants.

Members queried the loss of two staff at the City Gallery. In response it was stated that the museums could share staff with the gallery and accepted that this meant that the workload on some staff could increase. Concern was expressed on the impact this would have on the service and the working environment.

In relation to the fund raising post it was stated that this post had been deleted, as it had not proved to be self-financing. In relation to the project management team it was stated that this team had assisted managers who were managing projects in addition to their normal work but that the need to make savings proposals had made it necessary to delete the team.

### Efficiency savings quick wins.

Members raised questions over the reduction in recruitment advertising expenditure. In response it was explained that the size of adverts would be reduced with brief summaries and directions to the Councils Internet site instead of detailed job descriptions. It was stated that this approach was to be introduced across the Council.

In relation to provision of car parking spaces Members asked whether the need to pay for alternative transport for employees who needed their car irregularly would cost more and suggested that in terms of recruitment and retention and as a good employer the Council should take into account the need of employees to use their cars for activities that do not relate directly to work, such as childcare arrangements. In response it was stated that those that need cars for work on an infrequent basis would use other car parks and only re-claim the cost on those days when they needed their car for work which would make an overall saving on cost. In relation to childcare officers had not taken this into account but would check whether there was a requirement on the Council to do so.

Members queried where agency staff currently worked and whether a reduction would mean an increase in workload for permanent staff. In response it was stated that agency staff were mostly employed as administrators and clerical staff, though there were also some specialist areas such as planning and transport researchers. The plan was to replace agency staff with permanent staff which would cut costs although it was noted that there had been problems in recruiting in certain areas.

### Medium Term Department Efficiencies

Members questioned whether savings on transport were achievable in the light of the inability to achieve the projected savings from the transport review. In response it was stated that these savings were separate from those identified in the operational transport review and related to a double counting of income in a previous budget due to last minute changes at Council.

### Other Savings

### **Deletion of increased financial support agreed last year to the Leicester Regeneration Company.**

Disappointment at the lack of match funding from EMDA was acknowledged.

### **Reduction in net running costs at Braunstone Leisure Centre**

It was stated that the proposal reflected greater use of the Centre than had been predicted so less subsidy was needed. The concession for local residents would not be affected.

### **Reduce statutory environmental health services**

Members expressed concern that priority might be given to services that produced income such as wasp control, over those that didn't such as rat control. Members were assured that higher priority cases would always be done first, and that profit would not be a deciding factor.

### **Reduce economic development team**

In response to a query it was stated that whilst workers would not be based in an area support could be allocated from the headquarters team.

### **Claw back De Montfort Hall VAT offset**

In response to queries it was stated that De Montfort Hall had been receiving the offset since 2003/04 however, despite the claw back they would still receive more unearned income than they did in 2002. It was expected that the affect on the programme would be manageable. Serious concerns were expressed on behalf of the Labour group in relation to the affect this proposal may have on the De Montfort Hall programme, the out reach work currently done and the community hire charges for the venue.

It was suggested that it may be appropriate for the Scrutiny Committee to arrange a separate meeting to consider the placement of subsidy and the venue's programming to which the manager of DeMontfort Hall could be invited.

### **Reduce the staff in the Environment Team**

Support was expressed for the 'mainstreaming' of EMAS work but concern was expressed that it would be lost amongst other priorities. This concern was acknowledged and it was stated that this was the reason for the retention of the monitoring role.

### **Growth proposals**

#### **Increase funding to the Leicestershire Economic Partnership (LSEP)**

It was stated that no payment would be made to the LSEP until the matched funding supported by this funding had been agreed.

### **Budget pressures from previous revenue strategies and Cabinet decisions**

Members requested information on the current income from the car park at the former Granby Halls site. In response it was stated that income was still received but that the details would be provided outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 1) that the comments made in the consideration of the proposals be passed to Cabinet;
- 2) That the Resources and Equal Opportunities Scrutiny Committee be requested to consider the issues highlighted in relation to the areas of equality covered in the Equalities Impact Assessment completed as part of the budget process; and
- 3) That Cabinet be requested to further consider the implementation of increases in burial charges and that a staggered implementation be considered.