

Conservative Budget Workshop  
6 November 2013

General Comments

- Do not think the efficiency proposals with a relatively minor financial saving should be discussed at the expense of spending time considering the bigger items.
- The capital proposals should be re-ordered in order to make it clear how much money is being invested in particular areas / functions.
- It was noted that the IT reserve is not now being topped up for future investment which is why the IT investment proposals are on the list.
- Officers were encouraged to look into options for shared working and outsourcing with all services to be included in the consideration.
- The Leader announced that consideration needs to be given to charging for car parks at leisure facilities (with users refunded when they use the facilities)

Ref No	Description of Proposal	Comments from Conservative Members
E1	Winter closedown of Broadway Fountain	There was some support for this proposal while some Members were against. A suggestion was made as to whether the Letchworth Area Committee could be asked to fund the provision of the fountain from its discretionary budgets but there was concern this would set a dangerous precedent for all water features in the District. Some Members thought the disbenefit of this proposal was not worth the relatively minor financial benefit.
E2	Cease the production of bin hangers to advertise service changes for Christmas and other holidays	Suggestion made that if approved for investigation would want to reserve the ability to revisit this again in the 2015/16 budget process to see if the proposed alternative delivery methodology is appropriate and satisfactory. There was concern that a form of electronic notification would not be suitable for older residents in the District. A trial was suggested.
E3	Proposed incorporation of Hertfordshire CCTV partnership	There was some expectation that the estimated saving would be greater. Reassurance was provided that saving could increase once the trading company is established and is able to attract new business.
E4	Undertaking a backlog enhancement capital programme for buildings to reduce pressure on maintenance budgets	No Comment
E5	Reduction in Grant paid over to the Parish, Town and Community Councils for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme	There was a difference of opinion on the magnitude of the impact this would have on the Parish, Town and Community Councils. Officers agreed to calculate the amount of increase each Council would need to increase their tax rate by in order to collect the same total precept.
E6	Reduction in Area Committee discretionary grants by the same percentage as the reduction in the Council's Start Up Funding Assessment (currently estimated at 12% for 2014/15)	There was some support for this proposal.
E7	No further carry forward of unspent Area committee discretionary grant budgets	The Finance Portfolio holder reminded Members that carry forwards are considered each year on their merits although it is not expected this proposal will need to be implemented it will not be known until the end of the financial year when the amount of unspent funds is known.
Income Generation		
I1	New crematorium in Wilbury Hills. Capital costs are not yet known until the business case has been developed and agreed but is circa £1m-£3m	Confirmation was sought on the cost of the business case. It was noted that the wording in the narrative to the proposal needs to make clear that it is not just the demand from Letchworth that is being considered in the business case but the demand from the whole District.

Ref No	Description of Proposal	Comments from Conservative Members
I2	Increase in parking charges of 13.45% (lost years of inflation related increases)	Some Members were supportive of this proposal and noted that the District's car parks are cheap compared to other Districts and Towns. Other Members were not supportive of this proposal. Those that were not supportive want to see a strategic review of the way parking services is being delivered and a full cost / benefit analysis in order to make an informed decision. The Portfolio holder noted that the proposal is effectively re-setting the parking back to where the relative cost of parking fees were in 2010. He also suggested that consideration could be given to introducing variable time payment mechanisms in the parking machines. There was concern that a consistent increase across all car parks in the District would have a detrimental impact in some areas. On this the Portfolio holder reassured Members that the proposal is seeking agreement to a principle but that each tariff will be considered on a car park by car park basis.
I3	Increase in parking charges of 3.2% (estimated inflation increase for 2014/15)	An alternative presentation of the proposal using a pro-rata 10p increase on all tariffs was suggested rather than a 3.2% increase. It was also suggested that in order to make a business decision it is necessary to consider supply and demand and increases should be made where there is adequate demand for parking and decreases should be considered when a car park is not well used. i.e. a blanket increase is not appropriate. It was agreed the narrative of the proposal needs to make clear the proposal is seeking an in principle agreement to an increase on the current budget and that tariffs will be considered on an individual car park basis to achieve this. Narrative also needs to make clear that approval is only been sought for increases next year and not each year thereafter. When the capital proposals for parking services were considered it was noted that income is necessary to fund the large amount of investment required to maintain the car parks.
<b>Revenue Investment</b>		
R1	Local Plan Production, Examination and Delivery	The Portfolio Holder noted that this is not discretionary and the Council must have a Local Plan.
R2	Production of Neighbourhood Plans	
R3	Explore options for the provision of an Economic Development Officer	The Portfolio Holder noted that there are more than one potential partners to work with on this and the alternative options will be explored. The Finance Portfolio Holder noted that the time is right to consider an Economic Development Officer now because of the changes to local government finance and that there is the scope to influence the amount of business rates the Council is able to retain. Agreed that the narrative should be updated to reflect this. It was also noted that the time is right to have a dedicated officer in the Council who is able to work with the LEPs for the benefit of the District.
R4	Outdoor Sports Facility Study	
<b>Capital Investment</b>		
C43	Microsoft Enterprise Software Assurance	It was noted that the amount of investment required seems high. Open Source Software was suggested as an option to reduce costs.