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CENTRAL AREA COMMUNITY FORUM

Notes of the Forum held on 28 November at 7.00pm at the Whitworth Centre, Darley Dale

PRESENT

Derbyshire District Council **Dales** Councillors Ann Elliott (in the Chair), David Burton, Bob Cartwright, David Fearn, David Frederickson, Mike Longden, Lewis Rose, OBE and Geoff Stevens

David Wheatcroft (Chief Executive), Phil Colledge (Head of Finance), Jim Fearn (Communications & Marketing Manager) and Ros Hession (Overview & Community Engagement Officer)

Derbyshire Council **County** Neil Hickman (Assistant Director, Environmental Services) and Paul Jameson (Local Area Forum Liaison Officer)

Derbyshire Constabulary Inspector Bryan Hall and Sergeant Nick Reason

Members of the Public Barry Hopkinson (Matlock Town Council), A J Mumby (local resident), I T Walker & Julie Morrision (Darley Dale Town Council), R N E Walsh, Jayne Regan (South Darley Parish Council), Nick Dibben, Sheona Gee (Bridge in Action), Geoff Gee, Stephen Briscoe, Cllr Dave Oakley and Ingrid Pasteur (Darley Dale Town Council), Tom Pilkington (Darley Dale Tennis Club/Matlock Boys' Brigade/Matlock Hospital League of Friends/First Taste Charity), Iris Wagstaffe, Peter Langton, Stephen Coates plus one other
Remote participation- Alan Cottingham
(18 in total)

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Councillor Elliott introduced the Members and officers from the participating authorities and welcomed everyone to the Forum.

DERBYSHIRE DALES DISTRICT COUNCIL – SPENDING PLANS AND PRIORITIES 2012 / 2013

Phil Colledge outlined the results of the District Council's budget consultation:-

Priority services that the Council should spend most on:

- Creating and sustaining local employment
- Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour
- Keeping streets and public areas clean
- Improving the supply of affordable, decent housing

Services that the Council should spend least on:

- Subsidising special events
- Tackling climate change
- Ensuring the public know what the Council is doing
- Encouraging visitors to stay longer & providing Tourist Information Centres

The Corporate Plan 2011 – 2015 is based on budget constraints, the public's wishes, Members' aims and evidence of need. The three priorities for 2011-15 are:-

1. Housing which meets local needs

- Increase the availability of affordable housing
- Improve housing for vulnerable people

2. A clean, green and prosperous Dales

- Minimise waste & increase recycling
- Enable development sites & business growth

3. Safe and healthy communities

- Keep alcohol related crime low
- Encourage active & healthy lifestyles

Phil went on to highlight the District Council's current position:-

- We responded well to one of the harshest government grant cuts of any district council
- 16.2% grant reduction for 2011/12, and a further 15.6% cut in 2012/13
- We saved £1.3 million on our Budget for 2011/12
- **Savings target for next three years is between £1.2 - £1.4 million**

The approach agreed by Council in June 2011 to make these savings between 2012 and 2015 is to:-

- Reduce spending across all services while minimising as far as possible the impact on residents
- Reduce fixed and variable employee costs while protecting existing employees as far as practicable
- Assess utilisation of reserves and balances
- Consider future Council Tax increases
- Generation of additional income
- Consider shared services
- Increase fees and charges

Actions to be taken to achieve these savings:-

- Tourism – review of Visitor Services Delivery
- Waste Management – significant savings on new contract

- Public conveniences – review only meets costs of new loos
- Reorganisation of Street Cleaning/Grounds Maintenance
- Additional Income
- Reduce employee costs
 - review of organisation structure
 - some voluntary and compulsory redundancies
- Reserves & Balances
- Council Tax – aim to freeze for 2012-13

Questions and comments were then invited from the floor and issues raised as follows:-

Financial plans

- Councillor Burton noted, as an active Councillor, how frustrating it was that the District Council was in such a financial position, despite all political groups having acted responsibly, over past years, to lead the authority. He wanted the best for our local communities, praised the District Council's dedicated staff and feared there was little scope left for further cuts. He regretted the loss of tourist information centres. He applauded the new facilities at Arc Leisure Matlock and hoped that charges would not be increased to a level that would out price the market, particularly for youngsters.
- Phil Colledge responded that the approach to the Tourist Information Centres (as had been adopted for the Matlock Bath centre) is seen as quite an innovative way of delivering the service, through visitor information points at popular locations throughout he Dales, and allows the transfer of approximately £100,000 into small businesses.

District Council reserves

- In response to a question regarding the District Council's reserves, Phil explained that approximately £2M were held in 'general reserves' and can be used in any way which the council sees fit. A further £5M is earmarked for specific capital schemes.

Government grant

- Mr Mumby was impressed with the detailed presentation and asked about the level of government grant. Phil advised that Derbyshire Dales had lost about £0.5 million each year from government over the past few years. For most authorities, government grant equated to 50 / 60% of their overall income, but for Derbyshire Dales it equated to only 25%. Derbyshire Dales receives around £68 per head of population compared to others who receive around £85 per head. In setting its grant level, the government takes into account what income each district may be able to generate locally which is partly based on property values.

District Council annual expenditure

- In response to a further question from Mr Mumby, Phil confirmed that overall expenditure per annum for Derbyshire Dales District Council is around £10M.

Refuse contract

- In response to a question from a member of the public regarding changes to the waste management contract, Phil advised that food waste would be collected weekly and residual waste fortnightly and in addition the collection of recycled material would be increased eg kerbside collection for plastics. Negotiations had also taken place with the contractors to empty the bring recycle sites at no charge.

- In response to a question from Mr Mumby, Phil confirmed that the annual saving on the waste contract is estimated to be £375,000. Mr Mumby noted the split responsibilities between district and county councils for waste collection and disposal and believed there were savings to be made by bringing the processes under the responsibility of one authority. David Wheatcroft explained that the processes are totally different. In the past, local authorities have looked at bringing them together and also looked at moving waste disposal away from landfill. However, to bring the two together would prove quite difficult and in addition, there are different timescales for contracts which makes synchronisation almost impossible. Also, during the life of a contract, significant changes take place such as recycling rates and methods of collection which are further factors to take into account. He went on to highlight that the current refuse contract had been extended by two years as the original renewal time was not deemed as the right time to tender. The market place has changed significantly in the last couple of years as well as recycling targets which have been increased from 41% to 63%. Refuse collection and disposal may work well in unitary authorities, but it would be difficult to co-ordinate, within Derbyshire, 8 districts, one county and one unitary authority. The new refuse contract will bring about excellent savings and better recycling.

Civic amenity site, Harrison Way

- A member of the public commented that the new civic amenity site at Harrison Way was a brilliant facility. Mr Mumby added that he had visited Harrison Way three times and found the staff to be most polite and helpful. County Councillor Mike Longden was pleased to receive such positive comments and also pleased to report that anticipated highway safety concerns had not emerged.

Street cleansing and grounds maintenance

- A member of the public referred to the review of street cleansing and grounds maintenance and asked if these services would be contracted out. Phil explained that this would not be the case, but rather that existing work forces would be encouraged to work together more efficiently.

Shared services

- In response to a question about shared services, Phil advised that the District Council shares its Information, Communications and Technology service with North East Derbyshire District Council and the District of Bolsover. Other services such as reprographics and office cleaning have been explored with Derbyshire County Council, but have not been successful. Some companies, such as Northgate, have made a bid to take over some services, but so far these have not offered savings.
- Alan Cottingham had submitted a question via telephone, 'What progress has been made towards seeking SYNERGIES at county and district levels with particular regard to management structures?' Phil advised that there were no current plans to share management structures, but referred to his answer earlier regarding shared services.

Public conveniences

- Stephen Briscoe asked about the future of Hathersage toilets to which David Wheatcroft provided an update. Across the district there had been long debates about the future of the District Council's 34 facilities. Some new had been built; some would be closing, some opening seasonally and some being taken over by

parish councils and the private sector. Derbyshire Dales has more public conveniences per head of population than the City of Westminster. The facilities are predominantly used by visitors, but paid for by residents, With particular reference to the Hathersage public conveniences, the Director of Community Services was in discussions with the parish council and hoped to achieve a positive outcome.

New properties

- In response to a question from Iris Wagstaffe, Phil Colledge explained that the only income received by the District Council from new build properties is through Council Tax. An average of £180 per annum is received by the District Council per property with the remainder being distributed amongst the county, town / parish council and police and fire authorities. The District Council must provide services, such as refuse collection, for new build properties. The government has introduced the Homes Bonus scheme in a bid to recompense local authorities for the building of new homes. Under the New Homes Bonus scheme the government will match the council tax raised on each new house for six years.

Effective procurement

- Alan Cottingham had submitted a further question via telephone, 'What progress has been made on CONSORTIA purchasing at county and district levels (such arrangements perhaps embracing other county councils) to provide extra volume scale / negotiating 'clout' with suppliers?' Phil explained that the District Council uses organisations such as the East Midlands Purchasing Organisation and Derbyshire Purchasing Consortium to secure best deals for the supply of goods and services. The District Council had been the lead in securing a county wide contract for the procurement of swimming pool chemicals. Phil highlighted that sometimes better deals can be achieved through individual tenders, but assured that best deals are always sought.

Car parking provision and charges

- A member of the public noted the presentation and the District Council plans not to increase car parking charges, but referred to an action plan resulting from the traders' survey which recommended a review of car parking charges and sought clarification. David Wheatcroft explained that this was a review of car parks generally and how they operated. It may include a review of the pricing structure and how this may impact on income. The Citizens' Panel summer survey had included a question about residents parking permits which are greatly used and appreciated. Other councils are desperate to have schemes like the Derbyshire Dales one which is seen as extremely valuable and popular. However, David Wheatcroft highlighted that the scheme does cost the District Council. He also noted that car parking is the District Council's biggest income generator, subsidising many other services, so any decrease in income would impact on other services. The District Council continues to strive to retain current service levels within increasingly difficult financial constraints. Phil Colledge added that, despite an increase in car parking fees earlier in the year, income had remained fairly buoyant so the increased fees had not deterred visitors or residents to the area.
- Councillor Cartwright felt that car parking fees were expensive, but appreciated the revenue they attracted and how that impacted on the Council's overall income. He hoped that more arrangements could be put in place with retail organisations who would reimburse parking fees. He also believed that more flexible

arrangements could be in place around the residents' parking permit eg to allow 2 hour blocks to be used when required.

Funding for special events

- A member of the public referred to the reduction of subsidies for special events and asked if this affected Matlock Bath Illuminations. Phil advised that since an entry charge has been introduced the District Council has been able to significantly reduce the subsidy it makes to this event which is now at a break even point.

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - WINTER SERVICE ARRANGEMENTS

Paul Jameson began by highlighting the recent consultation carried out by Derbyshire County Council in regard to proposed changes to the precautionary gritting network.

The proposals were to split the network into two categories forming primary and secondary routes and adding a third tertiary category.

Primary and secondary routes will essentially cover the same lengths of road as previously. 60% covered by the primary routes and 40% by the secondary routes – around 1000 miles and 550 miles respectively. Therefore, about 47% of the county's roads and the County Council's coverage rate is one of the highest in the county.

The new tertiary category will cover routes not previously included in the precautionary gritting network and will generally involve snow clearance being carried out by external contractors (such as farmers). The routes within this category will include at least one route to isolated villages not already covered on the gritting network as well as schools not covered on primary and secondary routes, where possible. Roads serving residential and nursing homes will also be included where possible.

The reasons for these changes are four-fold: to make gritting of the county's roads easier to manage; to grit and clear snow from more roads than before; make better use of staff and equipment and also to safeguard against overspending the gritting budget.

Last year, the County Council overspent its £3.5 winter maintenance budget by £1m. This year, the budget is £2.5m with an additional £2m contingency budget, should another winter of extreme weather conditions be experienced, effectively £4.5m is available if required. However, the County Council cannot afford to overspend again.

The proposals were considered and approved by Cabinet on 1 November. Over 900 responses were received during the consultation with 76% of those who completed a questionnaire being in support of the proposals to split the network into categories. A good response had also been received from external contractors - around 105 registered an interest in assisting with the tertiary routes; 35 of which (1/3) are from within the Derbyshire Dales area. Given that there are 8 district and borough councils across the county, this is an excellent take-up for this area.

Alongside the consultation, the County Council also approached town and parish councils, asking for assistance with clearing snow from roads and pavements in their area under the 'Snow Warden' scheme. Under this scheme, participating councils will receive up to a tonne of grit free of charge; free training on snow and ice clearance; a free grit bin available on a first-come-first-served basis (up to 80 available) and regular updates on when routes have been gritted. In return, town and parish councils are asked to advise the County Council which pavements they will be gritting; encourage

residents to clear the pavements next to their homes and appoint a 'Snow Warden' to report back on the road conditions in their area.

The 'snow warden' scheme was first introduced last year and of the 70 town and parish councils which have signed up, 30 are from the Derbyshire Dales area.

Paul recognised the role of district and borough councils who continue to support the County Council in winter by clearing snow from footways in urban centres.

In order to keep residents as well informed as possible, the 'Snow' section of DCC's website has been enhanced. A variety of key information can be obtained during severe weather including information on gritting routes, grit bin locations, regularly updated information on which routes have been gritted and when, along with any school and library closures or events cancellations. There is a host of other useful information – such as winter driving tips.

Questions and comments were then invited from the floor and issues raised as follows:-

- A member of the public noted that some years ago, some of the tertiary routes, in and around Hathersage, were cleared by farmers, but this had, reputedly, stopped because of issues around appropriate insurance. Paul Jameson confirmed that insurance was required, but the paperwork had been simplified and that a £200 retainer was offered to assist with insurance etc.
- In response to a question from Mr Mumby, Paul confirmed that local businesses and farmers need to have public liability insurance cover of up to £5 million.
- A member of the public noted people being encouraged to clear pavements in their own vicinity, but also noted the current 'blame & claim' culture should an accident occur on that pavement. Paul referred to the 'myth busters' on the County Council's website and also information published in Derbyshire First. If people are sensible, there should be no issues arising.
- Iris Wagstaffe felt that local businesses and shops were also reluctant to clear snow around their premises because of the 'blame and claim' culture. Paul referred, as before, to the County Council website and Derbyshire First.
- Neil Hickman highlighted that Derbyshire County Council had been nationally recognised for the way in which they are engaging well with communities about winter maintenance arrangements.
- Councillor Cartwright referred to an on line petition for no more cuts to the winter maintenance budget. Neil and Paul advised that less than 400 signatures had been received and that 7,500 were required to necessitate a council debate.
- In response to a question from Sergeant Reason, Paul reported that salt stocks had been increased recently to around 24,000 tonnes. Although DCC is in a good position, during national salt shortages the supply of salt is taken out of the County's hands and distributed nationally, on a priority basis, which is largely out of DCC's control. Councillor Fearn added that last year conditions were exceptional and snow clearance in this area was very good compared to some areas. He welcomed the 'myth busters'.

- A member of the public asked if there were plans to keep the road between Wirksworth and Cromford open during severe weather – last year it never appeared to be cleared quickly or continually. It is a well used route, particularly by lorries, Paul was unsure of the route’s classification, but undertook to look into the matter.

Post meeting note – The route between Wirksworth and Cromford (B5036/B5023) has been designated a primary route.

QUESTION TIME

Questions and comments were then invited from the floor to representatives from the participating authorities and issues were raised as follows:

Derbyshire County Council – spending plans

- A member of the public asked about Derbyshire County Council’s spending plans. Whilst the County Council had not presented their spending proposals to the Forum, Councillor Mike Longden (Cabinet Member for Education) advised that the County Council have to save £90M in the next four years. The public are currently being invited to comment on spending proposals via the website or by participating in a consultation exercise. If there was sufficient interest and demand, an officer could attend a future Forum to make a presentation on spending proposals. He offered the following responses to particular issues raised:-

- Councillor Longden was unaware of a financial commitment of £75,000 towards the Olympic torch passing through Derbyshire, but undertook to look into the matter.

Post meeting note - It is correct that DCC has allocated a sum of £75,000, but this is not solely for the Olympic Torch Relay event. The funding was allocated to facilitate a partnership with Derby City Council, and a wide variety of other local partners, to stage a programme of activities centred around a Year of Culture.

The amount being spent on the Torch Relay is £22,000, which will be used to stage a series of dance events along the 80 mile route of the Torch Relay, involving young people and adults from all over the county. The cost of this equates to less than 3p per head of population but will enable local people to have a once in a lifetime opportunity to be involved in the Olympic Games.

- Councillor Longden had personally taken part in an overseas visit, which had been funded by local businesses, to the Russian space centre. The purpose of the trip was to ensure that the environment was safe for school children and establish business and twinning links.
- Planning permission for the waste incinerator at Sinfin has been turned down by Derby City Council.
- The County Council was indeed advertising for one chauffeur at an annual salary of £16,000. The chauffeur is required to transport the civic chairman (a role that has over 100 years tradition in Derbyshire) to official engagements and also carry out other duties.
- The records office was currently being refurbished, but Councillor Longden was unaware of any plans to employ an artist in residence as referred to, but undertook to look into the matter.

Post meeting note – The new Derbyshire Record Office (DRO) and Local Studies Library is a significant investment by DCC in preserving Derbyshire’s heritage and culture. It enables us to create up to 20 years’ additional storage capacity for the records

of Derbyshire organisations and businesses of all kinds, for the benefit of current and future users.

Bringing together the Records Office, the major county Local Studies Library and the online image database – Picture the Past – opens up countless opportunities for improved cooperation and a more convenient, seamless service for users.

Affordable housing

- Mr Mumby noted a number of properties still empty at the A6 flats development in Matlock and asked if these could not be used to accommodate those on the housing waiting list. Money on rent and sales was being lost. David Wheatcroft pointed out that the District Council does not subsidise these flats in any way – they are a Nottingham Community Housing enterprise.
- Many housing associations are now looking at converting properties from shared ownership back to rent to better fit the current market conditions. Mr Wheatcroft went on to explain the Home Options scheme – the District Council is only involved in the criteria for allocations - it is the individual landlord's responsibility to offer properties for rent.
- 40 years ago the District Council had been able to build and allocate its own properties, but the situation is totally different now with the Council's housing stock having been transferred 10 years ago to a social housing landlord (Dales Housing), as they had the ability to build houses where local authorities do not. Dales Housing have done an awful lot of work to improve the existing stock and build new properties. Plans are in the pipeline for legislation to bring empty properties back into use.
- Mr Mumby cited a new housing development taking place as part of the Cawdor Quarry development and asked why some of these 12 properties were not affordable. Mr Wheatcroft explained that this development was part of the overall Cawdor Quarry scheme. The planning consent had been in place for some time now under old regulations. A percentage of the total number of properties to be built must be affordable. Iris Wagstaffe believed that this was to be in Phase 3 (currently Phase One).

Darley Bridge – pavement obstruction

- A Darley Bridge resident asked if there were any plans to look at parking on pavements in the Darley Bridge area. Sergeant Reason had spoken with Pete Woolhouse, a member of the Darley Bridge Action Group, in relation to parking at Darley Bridge – Mr Woolhouse was to update the Action Group. Another resident cited particularly problems around Oldfield Lane where the whole pavement was sometimes obstructed. She went on to thank the police for their Speedwatch operation which had resulted in improvements. Sergeant Reason urged that obstructions to pavements be reported to the police.

CONCLUSION AND THANKS

Councillor Elliott thanked everyone for their participation and advised that the next Central Forum would be held on 26 March 2012.

Meeting closed at 8.30 pm