

Draft Budget 2011/12: feedback from consultation meetings

Two meetings took place on Thursday 13 January 2011. These notes provide a brief summary of the questions and issues raised.

In attendance for both meetings:

Councillors: Royston Smith, Ian Beagley, Adrian Evans, David Simpson, Keith Chapman, Roger Price, Jane Frankum

Chief Officer, John Bonney; Deputy Treasurer, Sarah Pook; Director of Corporate Services, David Howells; Accounting Manager, Jane Lovett

At the meeting with trades unions representatives

The following representatives attended:

Ali Burrows - Fire Brigades Union (Fire Control – Chair)
Dave Curry - Association of Principal Fire Officers (APFO)
Lee Joss - Networking Women in the Fire Service (NWFS)
Brian Neat - Fire Officers Association (Secretary)
Rikki Noble - Retained Firefighters Union (Chairman)
Paul Trew - Fire Brigades Union (Secretary)

The main issues raised included:

- The impact on staff of the recruitment freeze and the large number of temporary appointments.
- How confident can we be about achieving staff reductions?
- The need for an attractive voluntary redundancy scheme to implement staff reductions in a timely way.
- Impact of staff reductions and savings measures on retained personnel – leading to low morale. Need to be mindful about recruiting retained personnel in areas where availability is poor.
- Is the assumption of 9.25% reduction in government grant for 2013/14 and 2014/5 too optimistic given our relatively good settlement for the first two years?

At the meeting with representatives from the Hampshire Strategic Partnerships and Business interests

The following representatives attended:

David Springer	Federation of Small Businesses
Cllr Goff Beck	Councillor
Clive Clifford	Providence Park Residents Association
Nick Wilson	Chair of EH Community Partnership
Ann Bassil	Neighbourhood Watch
Guy Smales, Vice President	Hampshire Neighbourhood Watch Association
Janet Blann	Test Valley Community Safety Team (representing CSP's)
Ann Wakefield	Hampshire Constabulary

The Treasurer to the Authority, Carolyn Williamson.

The main issues raised included:

- Do we have problems recruiting firefighters?
- General acceptance that building up reserves while we have the opportunity makes sound business sense.
- Best to be pessimistic about the grant reductions in 2013/14 and 2014/15. Not unreasonable to assume it could be as high as 12.5% in each year (25% in total).
- Like the idea of working more collaboratively with partner organisations in order to drive down costs.
- We should consider making use of volunteers – particularly to improve resilience to help deal with large or unusual emergencies in local communities.
- Thought we gave a clear presentation of our financial position and the challenges we face.

There were no particular concerns raised about levels of council tax increases in future years (in the range of 0% to 2.5%)