

Draft Budget 2012/13: feedback from consultation meetings

Two consultation meetings took place on Monday 9 January 2012 at Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service HQ, Eastleigh. These notes provide a brief summary of the questions and issues raised.

In attendance for both meetings:

Councillors: Royston Smith, Ian Beagley, David Simpson, Roger Price, Jane Frankum, Jeremy Moulton, Marion Tucker, John West, Tim Knight

Chief Officer John Bonney, Deputy Treasurer Rob Carr, Director of Corporate Services John Beckerleg

At the meeting with trades unions representatives

The following representatives attended:

Dave Curry	Association of Principal Fire Officers (APFO)
Lee Joss	Networking Women in the Fire Service (NWFS)
Nigel McCullen	Fire Brigades Union (FBU)
Brian Neat	Fire Officers Association (FOA)
Paul Trew	Fire Brigades Union (FBU)
Shanti Waas	Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA)

The main issues raised included:

- A number of other Fire and Rescue Authorities are not taking the one off Council Tax (CT) freeze grant in 2012/13 because they want to have the CT increase in their base budgets. Are we putting ourselves at risk of needing to either increase CT by a larger amount in future years, or make further savings in our budget?
- Can we confirm that the 25% reduction in 2013/14 and 2014/15 is applied to the government grant and not our whole budget and when will we know what the settlement will be for 2013/14 and 2014/15?
- What level of CT increase would make up any shortfall in our budget forecasting rather than make further savings?
- If the future spending review settlements are particularly tough, will we continue to be able to make savings without cutting deeply into front line services?
- Will the government continue to use the current formula for grant allocation?

At the meeting with representatives from the Hampshire Strategic Partnerships

The following representatives attended:

Guy Smales	Hampshire Neighbourhood Watch Committee
Jane Hoolahan	Neighbourhood Watch Petersfield
Jean Roberts-Jones	One Community
Howard Linsley	East Hampshire Association of Parish and Town Councils
Alexander Johnston	Parish Town Councils Basingstoke
Tony Tuck	Hampshire Independent Advisory Group (IAG)
Wendy Clea	Hampshire IAG
Ian Buckett	Hampshire IAG
Min Partner	Hampshire IAG
Stuart Forster	Hampshire IAG
Chris Lovett	Hampshire IAG
Steve Searle	Hampshire IAG
Dianne Yexley	Hampshire IAG and Independent Scrutiny Forum.

Carolyn Williamson The Treasurer to the Authority.

The main issues raised included:

- Will the recruitment freeze cause us problems in our workforce in the long term?
- How do we account for the assistance we give to overseas operations, how does this impact on our services at home?
- In common with our partner emergency services we all suffer from hoax calls. Do we have a strategy for dealing with these? Do we have any plans to pass on the cost of false alarms to people?
- Can we expand on the use of our premises by communities and other partners to save money?
- We said that we prefer to prevent incidents from happening in the first place but we spend less on prevention than in response or protection; do we have any plans to increase the budget for prevention?
- Would we consider sponsorship to help meet any shortfall in funding to replace our emergency control room following the closure of the government funded scheme?
- We seem to be forming different partnerships since the closure of the regional control centre project and these new collaborations should provide benefits

- If there have to be increases in Council Tax (CT) it is better that these should be smoothed over the years.
- In order to make CT increases more acceptable we should publicise how we reduce demands for our services, make efficiency savings and invest to save.
- Can we confirm that the staff review and efficient and flexible crewing will not affect staff numbers on the fire stations?
- It is difficult to reduce staff numbers without lowering morale, especially when staff are expected to do more with less, sickness levels may increase and productivity may be affected.
- What was the reaction of the staff to the previous budget consultation?
- Will our staff reductions impact on our equalities strategy? Will there be reduced opportunities for us to make improvements that will help attract more women and other under represented groups in our community to join the service?
- From the children and young persons perspective, when we cut our budgets will we continue to invest in working with the police to go into the schools to reduce the impact of arson and road traffic collisions?

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