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CENTRAL AREA COMMUNITY FORUM

Notes of the Forum held on 23 November 2009 at 7.00pm at Waltham House / The Country Kitchen, Wirksworth

PRESENT

**Derbyshire Dales
District Council**

Councillor Peter Hume (in the Chair)

Councillors Shirley Buckingham, Peter Slack and Geoff Stevens

Phil Colledge (Head of Finance) and Ros Hession (Overview & Community Engagement Officer)

**Derbyshire County
Council**

Louise Swain (Project Manager : Stakeholder Engagement and Coproduction) and Kay McIntyre (Democratic Services Officer)

**Derbyshire
Constabulary**

DCI Sam Slack and Sergeant Jim Thompson

**Derbyshire Fire &
Rescue Service**

Chris Thornhill and Steve White (Consultation Officers)

Members of the Public

Carole Brister (Police Authority), Kate Millward, John Millward, John Lowe and John Thompson (5 in total).

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Councillor Peter Hume introduced the Members and officers from the participating authorities and welcomed everyone to the Forum. He also thanked Waltham House for hosting the Forum.

DERBYSHIRE DALES DISTRICT COUNCIL'S SPENDING PLANS AND PRIORITIES

Phil Colledge gave a presentation on the District Council's spending plans and priorities.

Priorities 2008 to 2011 – four priorities with six target areas which had been arrived at through extensive consultation with residents.

1. Affordable, decent housing	Affordable homes
	Decent homes
2. Safe communities	Environmental crime
	Alcohol related crime
3. Street scene	Public realm
4. Active, healthy communities	Central Area Leisure Centre
	Encouraging healthy lifestyles

The results of the Autumn Citizens Panel had revealed:-

Priority Services that the Council should spend most on

- Tackling crime & anti-social behaviour 33.4%
- Creating & sustaining local employment 26.1%
- Improving the supply of affordable housing 24.6%
- Keeping streets & public areas clean 22.6%

Services that the Councils should spend least on

- Subsidising special events 37.7%
- Encouraging visitors to stay longer 27.1%
- Ensuring the public know what the Council is doing 22.0%
- Providing Tourist Information Centres for visitors 17.6%
- Tackling climate change 17.1%

Services we should spend more on

- Tackling crime & anti-social behaviour 59.0%
- Providing public toilets 56.2%
- Keeping streets & public areas clean 56.0%
- Creating & sustaining local employment 55.8%

Services we should spend less on

- Subsidising special events 42.4%
- Encouraging visitors to stay longer 27.5%
- Tackling climate change 22.5%
- Ensuring the public know what the Council is doing 18.6%

Rank in order of preference for balancing the budget

- Increasing Council Tax 10.3%
- Increasing fees and charges 20.4%
- Reducing service levels 7.9%
- A combination of the above 43.9%

Phil went on to outline how the recession had impacted on the District Council, for example through loss of income in services such as planning and building control and an increased demand for benefits. The District Council had also suffered from a reduction in government grant, 20%, over the last three years and a loss of grant for concessionary bus fares, £150,000. Despite this, the Council is required to achieve a balanced budget whilst maintaining existing service levels and making new investment eg in public conveniences.

He concluded by showing the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan

	Estimate 2009/10	Forecast 2010/11	Forecast 2011/12	Forecast 2012/13	Forecast 2013/14
	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
Cumulative Deficit – No reduction in Government Grant	28	91	110	316	423
Cumulative Deficit – 10% reduction in Government Grant 2011/12 to 2013/14	28	91	271	633	891

Questions and comments were then invited and issues raised as follows:

- John Lowe enquired about the cost, to the District Council, of housing benefit. Phil Colledge advised that benefits are mainly funded by central government, but there is a cost to the District Council in their administration and processing.
- John Lowe was aware of Derbyshire County Council's 'single status' exercise and asked if Derbyshire Dales District Council would also be undertaking this exercise. Phil responded that the District Council had undertaken a similar exercise, 'Job Evaluation', in 2007, but negotiations were still taking place with the unions in order to implement the scheme.
- Councillor Hume noted that the results of the Citizens Panel had shown a desire for increased employment opportunities and yet encouraging overnight stays and Tourist Information Centres were not highly rated. These areas had an impact on each other and yet, appeared to bear no correlation, in the public view.

DERBYSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE

Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service were currently undertaking a consultation exercise on its Service Planning for 2010 to 2013.

Chris Thornhill outlined Derbyshire Fire & Rescue's 9 service priorities, namely:-

- Improvement
- Engagement
- Governance
- Service Delivery
- Equability & Diversity
- Partnerships
- Employees
- Assets
- Environment

She then went on to expand upon each priority and how it would be achieved. Members of the public were invited to express their views through a consultation questionnaire and invited to join a citizens' panel.

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

- Councillor Slack asked if there was any likelihood of Wirksworth Fire Station closing to which Steve White replied that there were no plans that he was aware of for such a closure, but all stations are subject to constant review in line with risk.
- John Thompson noted that the Fire & Rescue Service appeared to give good value for money. He went on to enquire if the budget would need to be re-directed to fulfil the Service's 9 identified priorities. Steve White advised that the aim of the current consultation exercise was to seek the public's view on what the priorities are and hence enable finances to be accordingly targeted to drive initiatives forward.
- John Thompson went on to ask if, at the end of the consultation exercise, there would be opportunity for the public to comment further on its results. Steve advised that the results would be published and action taken from there.

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Louise Swain introduced and then showed Derbyshire County Council's DVD 'Making Care Personal: Your Choice, Your Life' which shows the way in which social care services for adults is being transformed.

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

- John Lowe noted that public sector finances were looking gloomy and would it be possible to support and sustain the social care services highlighted in the DVD. Louise acknowledged that there would be difficulties, but sustaining the services was being carefully looked at. Some new funding had been made available for provision of the services and some was re-directed existing monies.
- Councillor Slack noted that this initiative had begun in the previous County Council administration and sought assurance that it would continue. Louise assured that it would continue as it was a government requirement, but the County Council's commitment remained, regardless of politics. This was an initiative with support from all parties to ensure that service levels are right.
- John Thompson asked if the County Council's approach to its social care service delivery was a ground breaking one or was it based on other models and / or good practice? The County Council felt that the individual is best placed to know what their needs are which had largely shaped the service delivery, Louise advised. In addition, government 'think tanks' had offered guidance.
- John Thompson went on to ask what the feedback had been from the service users to which Louise replied that it appeared to be good and service users had appreciated the opportunity to make their views known. The County Council had encouraged services users and those involved with their care, such as carers, to have their say. There had been some mixed reaction to service delivery, partly due to the fact that it was a change to what users had been used to.

QUESTION TIME

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

- Despite Bonsall's success in the Calor Village of the Year competition, there were still improvements to be made and John Millward urged the District Council to support an initiative by the villagers to improve a neglected and overgrown part of the park. The park, in the centre of the village, is leased and partly maintained by the District Council, but work needs to be done to the remaining part to make it a usable and attractive area. There was a willingness and expertise, from within the village, to carry out the work together with support from parish and district councillors. Councillor Hume noted issues around liability that may need to be resolved and that a meeting had been set up for Wednesday 25 November with district council officers to discuss what could be done. Councillor Stevens gave his support to the project which he hoped could be progressed, although no guarantees could be given until the meeting had taken place.
- John Lowe regularly travelled to Manchester by train and noted the £1 parking fee for rail users at Buxton station. He asked for an update on parking and fees for rail users of the Matlock station. Councillor Stevens and Phil Colledge believed that, when the station car park was re-developed, an area for parking was to be passed to East Midlands Trains. Councillor Stevens undertook to look into the matter.
- Councillor Slack had received complaints from local residents about the poor state of the road between Middleton and Wirksworth. The area in question had been 'patched', but surely it would have been better to resurface it? Kay McIntyre undertook to look into this.

CONCLUSION AND THANKS

Councillor Hume thanked everyone for their participation.

Meeting closed at 8.15 pm.