

CABINET : 15 DECEMBER 2004

RECONCILING POLICY AND RESOURCES: COMMENTS BY THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

As in previous years, Lead Cabinet Members and Chief Officers have shared their more developed thinking and draft Reconciling Policy and Resources proformas with Scrutiny Committees in the recent cycle of meetings. This has provided an opportunity for the Committees to consider whether there are issues they wish the Cabinet to take into account in refining the financial guidelines for 2004/05.

AUDIT AND BEST VALUE

It was agreed to inform the Cabinet of the Committee's comments as follows:

The unanimous view of the committee was that:

- the Cabinet should give further consideration to the potentially serious impact that the proposed savings, in particular from the Economic Development budget, could have on the economic health of the county. The Committee also felt that the Cabinet should seek to ensure that future matched funding bids are not jeopardized.
- the Council should explore opportunities for making further efficiency savings by developing closer relations with other organisations. For example, practices such as sharing accommodation could help produce 'economy of scale' savings.
- the Trading Standards budget should be protected from the savings proposed as further cuts would threaten the implementation of recommendations made by the Trading Standards Scrutiny Review Board which had been approved by the Committee at its previous meeting on 14 September 2004. With this concern in mind, and whilst taking into account the fact that after the next Council elections membership of the Council would increase from 44 to 49, the Committee proposed that the Cabinet should consider re-directing a proposed £50,000 increase in the budget set aside for Member's direct allowances towards the Trading Standards budget.

EDUCATION AND LIBRARIES

It was agreed to inform the Cabinet of the Committee's comments as follows:

The unanimous view of the Committee was that:

- the Cabinet should give further consideration to the fact that a large proportion of the LEA's budget is subject to existing contractual and statutory commitments, which cannot be reduced in the short to medium term. As a result, the Committee felt that Cabinet should ask the Education and Libraries Department to model savings only in areas of the budget over which the LEA has control.

- the Committee felt that the Youth Development Service provides an essential service and expressed great concern over the proposed modelled cuts to this budget. The Committee therefore asked Cabinet to consider other alternatives to these proposed savings.

SOCIAL SERVICES AND HEALTH

The Committee noted that the saving proposed in respect of 47a Western Road Mental Health Day Centre arose as a result of the outcome of a review by the Mental Health Partnership Board of Mental Health Day Services earlier in the year. It was suggested that the reference to 47a Western Road should make clear that the saving would be achieved by the closure and reprovisioning of the service.

The Committee was also concerned that the reference to control totals for home care should make clear that the proposed savings action was to limit, rather than reduce, the control totals.

It was agreed to inform the Cabinet that the Committee:

(1) deplores the underfunding by Government for Social Services provision in East Sussex which is responsible for the reductions being forced on the Service;

(2) recommends that the proposed saving of £65,000, by reducing support for disabled children and their families by reducing the outreach service or the sessional worker budget, be reconsidered and savings achieved elsewhere; and

(3) recommends that the proposed saving of £15,000, by reducing the Fostering Support Budget, be reconsidered and savings achieved elsewhere.

TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

It was agreed to inform the Cabinet that the Committee:

(1) expresses concern that, whilst the services provided by the Transport and Environment Department impact upon every resident of the County, it is those services which have always borne the brunt of cuts in previous years;

(2) supports the intention to use part of the decriminalised parking income to maintain and improve passenger transport services;

(3) recommends that any proposals to use decriminalised parking surplus should give priority primarily to those areas from which the income is received;

(4) recommends that kerbing should have a higher priority within the Highways Maintenance Budget;

(5) recommends that further consideration be given to identifying additional savings in respect of the Sussex Downs Conservation Board administrative costs and to eliminating any duplication of activity wherever possible;

(6) recommends that the fees for minibus drivers' training should be increased to ensure a source of income for the County Council; and

(7) recommends the introduction of a publicity campaign to alert passengers using those publicly funded bus services which are under threat of withdrawal that they should "use them or lose them.