

**Notes of the meeting of the SANDWICH Neighbourhood Forum held on  
5 February 2009 at Worth Village Hall, The Street, Worth at 7.00pm**

Present: DDC Cllr Sue Chandler Chairman  
Worth PC Cllr Ian Martin Vice-Chairman

Other Councillors and members of the public.

An apology for absence was received from KCC Cllr Leyland Ridings

**1. Chairman's welcome**

Cllr Sue Chandler welcomed those attending and apologised to those individuals who had not received an electronic copy of the Notes of the previous meeting.

**2. Notes of previous meeting**

Were approved as a correct record and there were no matters arising.

**3. Dover District Council's Budget setting process**

3.1 DDC Councillor Ian Ward, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources and Performance, gave a presentation on where Councils' money came from and where it was spent, illustrating it with tables of income sources for KCC, DDC and Towns/Parishes together with expenditure for the three tiers.

3.2 Of total £55,086m raised by Council Tax in 2008/09 KCC received £39,887m, DDC £5,881m, Police £5,103m, Fire £2,539m and towns/parishes £1,676m.

3.3 Central government grant to DDC of £10m would be increased by 0.5% next year and not at all year after. However budget pressures continued to increase but shortfalls could not all be met by increasing Council Tax as maximum level was 'capped' by government at 5%.

3.4 DDC had third lowest rate of Council Tax in Kent and, like others, was being hit by reduced income from interest rates. Steps already taken included:

- reducing establishment and recruitment freeze
- on-line advertising
- reduced Audit Commission fees
- better procurement
- pre-planning advice
- joint working with other districts

3.5 Prioritising services to see where savings could be made is a key part of DDC processes as doing nothing is not an option.

**4. Question and answer session**

- What's happening with shared landlord services? Housing Revenue Account is ring fenced and separate from Council's General Fund; cost of meeting Decent Homes Standard is a pressure, have closed 5 sheltered schemes; are sharing services with Shepway, Thanet, Canterbury and Ashford resulting in total of 20,000 properties to be managed by one organisation (has no name yet). This will not alter

relationship between tenants and their own Council landlord, only one central organisation to manage and driven by efficiency.

- With interest rates so low isn't it a good time to encourage more tenants to buy Council houses as would generate income? Huge discounts available under Right to Buy scheme in 1980s no longer exist so is not so attractive to tenants; best properties have already been sold. 75% of sale price goes to central government and only 25% to DDC therefore constant rent income is often better than one-off 25%. DDC has about 4,500 properties left.
- We've heard about public toilets, what other non-statutory services are you looking at? This is purpose of exercise to follow. Have told officers that some are not acceptable e.g. charging for green waste, bin tax, fortnightly refuse collections. Have stated parking charges will not increase again during our administration.
- Investments: DDC still has some funds in Iceland but are hopeful of getting most of it back in time; we got back 85% of BCCI investment. Iceland is more complicated than BCCI and government has placed moratorium of 2011 on when Councils must declare losses.
- Why is Shepway top of league table for Council Tax? Because it took decision to be a high spending authority.
- Does 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest mean 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest in services as well? District Audit looked at our use of resources and gave score of 3 out of 4. Inspection of our regeneration programme rated good with good prospects. DDC is low taxing and reasonably high performing.
- How many tenants are on Council Tax benefit and who pays for it? Dover District has highest rate in Kent for tenants receiving benefit which is paid for through income tax. If DDC pays higher rate than standard or pays when claimant is not entitled, then DDC bears cost. If we pay standard rate and make no mistakes, government pays.
- Will funds for modernising schools programme come from government or Council Tax payers? If it happens will be predominantly funded by government grant.
- We accepted higher housing figures because of benefits from Growth Point status; how will it benefit us? £2.9m allocated to DDC because of Growth Point status but restricted on what it is spent on: some to be used on river Dour scheme to assess flood risk to developments in central Dover. Increasing number of houses should increase population and income from Council Tax plus increasing skill levels and disposable income. Many funding streams now open to DDC plus Dover Harbour Board scheme.
- When is Burlington House going? Need for compulsory purchase has delayed by a year but timetable for construction start was, and still is, 2010/ 11. Land assembly is nearly complete. Last thing DDC needed was a recession right now!
- Has Asda pulled out? Asda is still there, Morrisons left but came back.
- We have cruise terminal and passengers but no town for them to visit. National statistic shows 15% of shops in all high streets are closed

## 5. Group Budget Exercise

The Forum broke into three discussion groups to identify service priorities and cuts to cover deficit and balance budget.

- Group 1:
- address only 3 areas this year and others in future
  - leave community safety, community development, green waste, refuse and car parking alone

- save £50k on tourism: leave to websites and commercial sector, tourists don't stop in Dover
- save £20k on conservation & design: money spent in Sandwich and Deal is fine, we like what we have, system is too restrictive.
- save £30 on public toilets; cut out 4 and encourage local shops/pubs to allow use of facilities.

- Group 2:
- Make £200k green waste charges to cover deficit plus £100k to put into tourism to attract cruise tourists, stop them going elsewhere and boost local economy.
  - don't cut public toilets – will be needed by tourists.

- Group 3:
- leave green waste, refuse collection and community safety alone
  - Save £100k by reducing tourism expenditure by 50%
  - look at reducing conservation/design staff by 1; negotiating with Parishes/Towns on public toilets
  - other possibilities: increase car parking charges; freeze wages; reduce unnecessary consultation and other papers issued.

The Chairman concluded the discussion by thanking all those involved for taking part in the valuable exercise which had been a 'first' for Neighbourhood Forums as direct participation in the budget process. The real issues raised by those contributing had highlighted local concerns and would be taken back to the District Council.

6. **Suggested topics for Future Forums**

The Forum was asked to let the Chairman know of topics for future discussion: Planning Aid organisation willing to come and talk to groups of parishes about aspects of planning; LDF progress update.

The meeting ended at 8.45pm.