

INFORMAL MEMBER GROUP ON BUDGETARY ISSUES

NOTES of a meeting of the Informal Member Group on Budgetary Issues held in the Wantsum Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 14 May 2010.

PRESENT: Mrs T Dean (Chairman), Mr L Christie and Mr R F Manning

ALSO PRESENT: Mr J D Simmonds and Mr H Yardley (Observer)

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms L McMullan (Director of Finance), Mr A Wood (Head of Financial Management), Mr P Sass (Head of Democratic Services and Local Leadership) and Mrs A Taylor (Research Officer to Cabinet Scrutiny Committee)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

11. Notes of Previous Meeting on 14 April 2010

(Item 1)

- (1) Mr Wood circulated a note providing Members with answers to the points raised at the previous Budget Informal Member Group (IMG) on 14 April 2010.
- (2) Agency staff: In response to a question Mr Wood confirmed that he was content that the Council's use of temporary staff was appropriate and that the mix between permanent and temporary staff was proportionate.
- (3) Ms McMullan explained that there was uncertainty across the Council about where posts might be removed to make necessary savings. There was a need to distinguish between generic posts across the organisation and specialist posts to determine where it might be appropriate to implement a recruitment freeze on particular posts but that it would not be appropriate to have a complete freeze on recruitment.
- (4) Mr Manning highlighted his concerns that the Council should not be using temporary staff to cover vacancies held up by departments as efficiency savings.
- (5) Mr Simmonds explained that there were benefits to more flexible job descriptions across certain areas of the Council to enable staff at risk in one directorate to find suitable positions in other directorates where there were vacancies.
- (6) Members agreed that Ms Beer be invited to the next meeting of the Budget IMG to discuss the savings being made through vacancy management, the use of temporary staff and whether savings were being achieved through efficiency or whether permanent staff were being replaced with agency staff. Mrs Dean introduced anecdotal evidence (unverified) from two unnamed constituents implying this might be the case. Members asked that Kent Top Temps be asked to provide a snapshot of information regarding the number of temporary staff being employed by Kent County Council at a specific time.

- (7) Information on Redundancies: Members asked that the position on the number of redundancies across the authority be updated in future reports.
- (8) Regarding the pressure on legal services, the 2009/10 information would be provided at the next meeting of the Budget IMG. The most recent information relating to money spent on employment tribunals would be circulated to members of the Budget IMG.
- (9) Members were pleased to note that work was underway on a re-drafting of the Budget Book and the Budget IMG would be consulted at the appropriate time on its format.
- (10) In relation to the payment of invoices Mr Wood explained that overall performance for 2009/10 was due to be similar to previous years. There was a target to improve on payment rates and this was being worked on, there was a need for the whole organisation to be more proactive and joined up to speed up payment rates.
- (11) Following the Government Election Members had a brief discussion regarding the County Council's role in the Government's review of Local Government finance. Mrs Dean asked that KCC approach Government with an offer to work with them on the proposed review of the Local Government system, and production of a report summarising the recommendations we would make for changes. Ms McMullan confirmed that early discussions had been had with Mr Greg Clarke MP. The Council's response to the Lyon's review would be circulated to Members of the Budget IMG. Ms McMullan would report back to the Budget IMG on where the Council's input was best placed in the Government's review.

RESOLVED that the Budget Informal Member Group:

- (12) Invite Ms Amanda Beer to its next meeting on 10 June 2010 to discuss the savings being made through vacancy management, the use of temporary staff and whether savings were being achieved through efficiency or whether permanent staff were being replaced with agency staff.
- (13) Ask that Kent Top Temps be asked to provide a snapshot of information regarding the number of temporary staff being employed by Kent County Council at a specific time.
- (14) Ask that the position on the number of redundancies across the authority be updated in future reports to the Budget IMG, this issue would also be raised with Ms Beer.
- (15) Note that the information for 2009/10 on the pressure on legal services would be provided at the next meeting of the Budget IMG.
- (16) Welcome the offer of the Director of Finance to circulate the Council's response to the Lyon's review to members of the Budget IMG.

12. Revenue & Capital Budgets Monitoring Exception Report

(Item 2)

- (1) The current budget position was around £8million underspend for the County Council assuming that Kent Adult Social Services Directorate were able to balance their budget. There was a possibility of a small overspend in this directorate but this was being monitored.
- (2) The main areas of change were within the Children, Families and Education Directorate where there was an underspend of £1.915million. The main pressures were within the Fostering Service due to an increase in the number of new placements into KCC fostering. The Localism and Partnerships Team had a small underspend of £0.022million compared to the £0.187 pressure reported last month. This was mainly due to the District Grants for Local Priorities; a few of the districts were yet to claim their grants and this therefore would roll forward to 2010-11.

RESOLVED that the Budget Informal Member Group note the Revenue and Capital Budgets Monitoring Exception Report.