

Budget Roundtable Discussion

A roundtable discussion was hosted by the Council Leader with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Central Services on 7th June with invitations issued to the three recognised trades unions, the Community & Voluntary Sector Forum and the Opposition parties' leaders and finance spokespersons.

The objective of the meeting was to review the 2011/12 budget and to start an open and inclusive approach to the 2012/13 budget setting process. This report does not set out all of the issues raised in those discussions which included both some common views and some areas of genuine difference between contributors. As an example there was a consensus about the importance of the local authority ensuring adequate quality in external service provision through its procurement and contract monitoring processes, particularly in social care. However there were differences of views about the right balance between local authority direct service provision and the potential benefits from giving opportunities for other providers to deliver public services, in particular those from the community and voluntary sector and social enterprises.

A range of practical actions recommended for immediate approval by the Cabinet emerged from the meeting. They are set out below.

- (1) Strategic concerns were raised about the cumulative impact of a range of public service expenditure reductions on young people in the city and on those at risk of financial exclusion. It is proposed that the first issue will be considered as part of the Youth Review currently underway and the second as part of the development of a new Financial Inclusion strategy, including updated Equalities Impact Assessments in these areas.

Both of these pieces of work will be reported to Scrutiny in the autumn before decision making by Cabinet. One off resources of £0.500m was set aside in the 2011/12 budget to support the implementation of the Youth Review and £0.400m was set aside to support the Financial Inclusion work.

- (2) There was an important debate about the long term role of the council in its capacity as a Local Education Authority given changes to role and funding being implemented at a national level. These changes have important budget consequences as well as the overarching educational and policy ones. It is proposed that further consideration be given to this matter.

- (3) A number of specific concerns in relation to the council's 2011/12 budget were raised by the Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Central Services at this meeting and these and others have also been highlighted in other fora by various members of the Administration. It was recognised that in many areas including the Connexions service and Education Welfare Service, savings had already been fully implemented and that it was not practicable now given the overall financial position for these to be reversed.

- (4) It is recommended however that Brightstart Nursery remains open. There is sufficient funding in the 2011/12 budget to facilitate this.

- (5) It is also noted that options for the future of Castleham Supported Employment scheme are still being explored and again there is sufficient funding for this service to continue as is for 2011/12. Further consideration of the long term financial support required to both these service areas will be incorporated into the 2012/13 budget planning process.

- (6) It is proposed that further consideration be given to the future of day services for older people prior to the commencement of the planned consultation exercise which will be delayed until the autumn. There is sufficient funding in the 2011/12 budget to facilitate this further review.

Further budget roundtable discussions will be held on a similar basis as part of the planning process for the 2012/13 budget.