

Borough Council Budget 2002/2003

Notes of Business and Voluntary Sector Consultation Meeting

Town Hall, Eastbourne - Wednesday 12 December 2001 at 5.00pm

<u>Present:</u>	
Business and Voluntary Sector Representatives:	
Mr Steve Barnett, Eastbourne Buses	
Mrs Lesley Goble, Eastbourne Association of Voluntary Services	
Revd Canon Charles Lansdale, St. Mary's Parish Church	
Mr Tony James, Town Centre Management Initiative	
Mr Sean Kavanagh, Eastbourne Downs Primary Care Group	
Mr Julian Martyr, Eastbourne Hotels Association	
Mr Ken Stevens, Federation of Small Businesses	
Mr Geoffrey Williams, Eastbourne Association of Voluntary Services	
(N.B. A total of 28 representatives of business, voluntary groups and public agencies had been invited).	
Eastbourne Borough Council:	
Councillor Graham Marsden, Leader of the Council	
Councillor Bob Lacey, OBE, Deputy Leader of the Council	
Mrs Sue McHugh, Director of Finance & Corporate Services	
Mr Norman Kinnish, Director of Planning, Regeneration & Amenities	

1.	<p>Presentation by Councillor Marsden, Leader of the Council and Mrs McHugh, Director of Finance and Corporate Services</p>
1.1	<p>A presentation was given outlining the Council's timetable for budget setting, the Government's budget settlement proposals and details of the Council's short and long term financial strategy. An outline of the current position was reported together with details of proposed growth, cost pressures and savings proposals. A forecast of the resources likely to be available to the Council and its capital strategy together with an outline of other funding opportunities available to the Council were given. Copies of the presentation were circulated.</p>
1.2	<p>This consultative meeting formed part of a wider programme of consultation. Last July the Leader had written to representatives of the town's business and voluntary sectors and certain public agencies outlining the draft financial strategy</p>

before they made their recommendations to the budget meeting of Full Council which was due to be held on 27 February 2002.

2.	Comments by Representatives of the Business and Voluntary Sectors
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2.1

Supplementary Business Rates

Mr Martyr asked how the Government's plans for Business Rates had progressed. Mr Kinnish said that current indications were that the Government favoured the United States model of Business Improvement Districts (BIDS). Such districts (at sub-ward level) would be run by business ratepayers themselves with elections organised on their behalf by the local Council. A majority vote of such ratepayers would be required to establish a BID. Funds raised could be used for such initiatives as town centre management, environmental improvements, policing etc. A Government White Paper was expected and it was anticipated that the Council would wish to consult locally with the business community before making its response.

2.2

Short Term Financial Strategy

Mr Martyr referred to the proposal to reduce subsidies for lower priority services highlighted in the presentation. He asked whether any of these would impact on tourism related areas of activity. Mrs McHugh said that the aim was tackle loss making services or services coping with a substantial backlog of repairs or under investment. She said she did not believe the services identified would impact upon tourism with the possible exception of the proposal to increase (by a rate above inflation) the charges for seafront chalets.

2.3 **Support to Voluntary Sector**

Mrs Goble drew attention to the important role the voluntary sector played within the town and in particular, their involvement in a number of partnerships with statutory agencies and others. Such partnerships were often important in securing external financial support from the Government and other funding bodies. The Leader drew attention to the proposal to increase financial support to the voluntary sector by 8% in next year's budget.

2.4 **Best Value and Audit Inspection Costs**

A number of questions were raised regarding the contribution Best Value would play in easing the Council's budget pressures and the Council's audit costs. The Leader acknowledged that there would be some savings from Best Value but not necessarily at an 'across the board' level of 2% expected by the government. He commented that gains from savings would to some extent be offset by the costs incurred by the Council in meeting external audit and best value inspectorate costs.

2.5 **Capital Strategy**

The Leader reported on the limited funding provided by Central Government to support the Council's capital programme. This had to be supplemented from asset disposals and other sources of funds. Councillor Lacey commented on the progress of the disposals programme and the Council's ongoing review all non-operational land and assets.

2.6 **Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)**

Mr Stevens asked about the Council's plans to establish a Local Strategic Partnership. The Leader reported that the establishment of an LSP for Eastbourne was well in hand with a further meeting of potential partners planned for early in the New Year. He also reported on the need to work closely with the East Sussex Local Strategic Partnership which was being set up by the County Council.

2.7 **Seafront Strategy**

In reply to a question from Mr Martyr the Leader reported that good progress was being made towards implementing the Council's Seafront Strategy. Planning permission had now been granted in respect of the planned private investment to Treasure Island. A project group had been set up to identify potential private sector involvement in the Bandstand and a planning brief had recently been agreed for a hotel site. The potential of the Fisherman's Green area was also being actively investigated.

2.8 **Major Project**

Mr Martyr asked whether the Council had plans for some major initiative which he felt the town as a whole would be able to rally around. In reply, the Leader referred to two particular projects. The first, the Cultural Hub was a scheme to provide for a new Towner Art Gallery and Conference Centre on the site between the Congress Theatre and Winter Gardens. It was currently valued at £8.35m. The second scheme was a proposal to create an Enterprise Hub with the aim of developing small businesses. Councillor Lacey provided a detailed briefing on both these initiatives.

2.9 **Council Tax**

Mr Martyr asked whether there was a case for increasing the Council Tax in order to fund major initiatives which would in turn bring prosperity to the town. The Leader said that a 1% increase on Council Tax would generate £40,000, however, he believed it was important to make effective use of existing resources and that the town's taxpayers already paid enough. It was his administration's aim to seek to limit the level of increase in Council Tax next year.

The meeting closed at 6.15 pm.