

**EXECUTIVE CONSULTATION MEETING  
WITH NON-DOMESTIC RATEPAYERS**

**WEDNESDAY 15 JANUARY 2003 AT 8.30AM AT PIRELLIS**

**PRESENT:-** Councillors Firth, Mitchelson and Stevenson.

**ALSO PRESENT:-** Members of the Large Firms Affinity Group, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive and the Head of Finance.

**1. CONSULTATION ON THE EXECUTIVE'S BUDGET PROPOSALS  
FOR 2003/04**

Councillor Stevenson stated that the purpose of the meeting was to consult with non-domestic ratepayers on the Executive's draft Budget proposals for 2003/04, copies of which had previously been circulated to the Members of the Large Firms Affinity Group. Whilst the Budget was aimed at domestic ratepayers, views expressed at this consultation meeting were also important to the Executive.

Councillor Stevenson pointed to the fundamental changes introduced within the City Council over the last four years which included the Housing Stock transfer, Leisuretime externalisation, the sale of Carlisle Airport, organisational change within the City Council's staffing structures and the introduction of an Asset Management Plan.

He considered that the economic vitality of the City was very important to the City Council.

Councillor Stevenson drew attention to the fact that the Executive's Budget proposals were the subject of a major consultation exercise with the public who had been asked to comment on the Executive's proposed future priorities and the level of Council Tax that should be set in 2003/04.

Councillor Stevenson then invited questions on the Budget proposals.

*A question was raised about the proposed Budget saving of £10,000 in 2003/04 and £25,000 in 2004/05 and 2005/06 in respect of the Business and Enterprise Support Budget.*

Councillor Firth advised that this had arisen as a result of a recent Best Value Inspection which had recommended that places like the Brampton Business and Telecentre and the Enterprise Centre should be given more flexibility and management responsibility over their operations. It was the Executive's intention that these organisations should become independent of City Council control.

*The large businesses in Carlisle were very concerned about car parking and traffic congestion in the City. Are there any proposals coming forward on Park and Ride initiatives?*

Councillor Stevenson responded that the County Council was responsible for traffic management within the City and the City Council responsible for car parks. The Executive recognised the need to review car parking in the City and this was an area which would be investigated in detail in 2003/04.

*Does the City Council have a strategy in place for dealing with the County Council to co-ordinate action on traffic management and car parking?*

Councillor Mitchelson drew attention to the existence of the Joint Transport Advisory Group at which representatives of the City and County Councils and other organisations with transport interests met to discuss transport issues affecting Carlisle. The City Council was in discussion with Stagecoach who were keen to introduce an experimental park and ride scheme in Carlisle. The City Council would be lobbying the County Council on this proposal.

*Could the large businesses in Carlisle assist in raising the profile of transport issues facing Carlisle?*

Councillor Mitchelson replied that the Executive would be prepared to meet with the Large Firms Affinity Group to have detailed discussions on transport to identify specific issues upon which the County Council could be lobbied. The City Council was not, however, decision makers on traffic management in Carlisle.

*Planning approval had been granted by the City Council for a new supermarket on the west side of the City. This would have a huge impact on traffic flows and affect businesses operating on the western side of the City.*

Councillor Firth considered that, as part of the planning approval, improvements to the road network in the vicinity of the new store would be implemented and the Highway Authority had said it would improve the position on congestion at this location.

*If the City Council's role in transport was confined to lobbying for improvements, resources should be put in to ensure that high level lobbying to the County Council and the Government could be undertaken so that a real difference could be made.*

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive pointed out that the City Council did put resources into car parking in the City and that improving car parking was a specific issue upon which the public were being consulted as part of the Executive's public consultation process on the Budget for 2003/04.

In addition, a meeting between City and County Councillors was being arranged at which transport issues facing the City would be discussed informally. The City Council would welcome any specific views on transport from the Large Firms Affinity Group which could then be raised at this meeting.

*The following issues were highlighted:-*

*Traffic congestion was a major concern as it was difficult to persuade new business to the area when visiting business people found roads in Carlisle gridlocked.*

*The various agencies involved in transport and traffic issues, both locally and nationally all worked under specific constraints. There was a need to effect changes to strategies through lobbying activity at the highest level.*

*There should be a peripheral route around Carlisle so that through traffic does not have to negotiate the centre of Carlisle.*

*There should be good car parking in the City Centre and good signage to the car parks.*

*Park and Ride initiatives were to be welcomed.*

*Carlisle was effectively being cut off from the rest of the country with deteriorating roads, rail network improvements causing major delays to rail services and the lack of air transport at present.*

*Whilst the northern relief road would help traffic flows, it was disappointing that this was not going to be a dual carriageway.*

Councillor Mitchelson reported that representatives of the City Council did, from time to time, meet with the Highways Agency and hopefully the Strategic Rail Authority and could raise specific concerns at these forums.

*A question was raised as to whether the City Council was considering tolls and congestion charges for the City..*

Councillor Mitchelson confirmed that this was not being considered.

It was agreed that discussions should take place between Executive Members and the Large Firms Affinity Group to further investigate transport issues.

*A question was raised as to the percentage rise on the Rate Support Grant allocated by the Government to the City Council in 2003/04.*

The Head of Finance replied that a 7½% increase had been allocated by the Government with also additional Housing Benefit Grant.

*How would the writing off of the Housing Revenue Account deficit affect the 2004/05 Budget?*

The Head of Finance indicated that there was currently a surplus on the HRA which would transfer to the General Fund so there would be no impact on the 2004/05 Budget.

*Given the 7½% increase in Central Government support and the fact that the Executive's spending and savings proposals were almost neutral, which ongoing costs had increased above the rate of inflation?*

The Head of Finance indicated that these were mainly wage costs as a result of the recent national pay settlement for Local Government and the increase in the employers National Insurance contributions. In addition, the Housing Stock Transfer had a major impact on the Budget for 2003/04.

*Which of the options put out to public consultation did the Executive prefer?*

Councillor Stevenson replied that there was no favoured option at this stage pending the outcome of the consultation process. The Executive would be deciding upon its recommendation on 6 February 2003.

*A question was raised as to the reasoning behind the feasibility study proposals in the Executive's draft Budget.*

Councillor Mitchelson reported that the Executive considered that Carlisle did not have the range of sporting facilities that could be seen in other Cities. A feasibility study was planned into providing a new sports complex to combine a swimming pool and arena which could be used as an ice rink. This would be in addition to The Sands.

He further reported that Councillors had received suggestions from the public that more use should be made of riverside areas within Carlisle and a second feasibility study was planned to look at a range of activities, etc which could be undertaken on or near the three rivers in Carlisle and which could trigger economic growth.

*Does the City Council see the scope for further opportunities like the Carlisle and Eden Local Strategic Partnership where resources could be combined to avoid duplication in the provision of services?*

Councillor Mitchelson confirmed that the City Council was looking to develop joint initiatives with Eden and pointed to the success of the green waste recycling programme and proposals being put forward for joint working on decriminalised parking in Carlisle and Eden.

Councillor Stevenson referred to the Regional Government debate which may lead to the abolition of the City and County Councils and the establishment of unitary Authorities covering more than one current District Council area.

*Has funding been placed in the 2003/04 Budget to enable a sufficiently strong profile to be given to transport issues in order that high level lobbying can be undertaken with the County Council, Government, etc to achieve action?*

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive referred to the recent organisational review carried out within the City Council and which provided for two posts of Executive Director. He considered that these postholders would engage on

lobbying for transport improvements for Carlisle and that the City Council would be prepared to work with the Large Firms Affinity Group to identify specific concerns so that the appropriate actions can be identified to effect change.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Councillor Stevenson thanked those present for all the comments expressed and which would be taken into account by the Executive prior to the final Budget recommendations being put to the City Council.

(The meeting ended at 9.20am)