

## EXECUTIVE – 14 JANUARY 2013

### RESPONSES TO 2013/14 BUDGET CONSULTATION

1. Dear Sirs,

Having looked at the budget consultation documents, I am generally in agreement with what is being proposed. I recognise that the Council, both elected members and officers, are making every effort in a very difficult financial climate.

My only concern is the proposed capital expenditure on the Arts Centre planned for the Central Methodist Hall. I do not feel that this is appropriate given the financial constraints in other areas. If this plan was not implemented until the financial climate improved, which seems unlikely in the next few years, it appears to me that substantial savings could be made in the short term, and I suggest this may be a saving worth further consideration.

2. Dear Dr Gooding,

Thank you for the consultation process regarding the city budget and the continued austerity we face.

Perhaps one area to make savings is to look closely at the management of Parish Council expenditure.

In Brampton about 20% of the annual precept is spent on providing Christmas lights i.e. nearly £20,000.

The lights may be nice but are they essential, do they really enhance trade and can such extravagance be justified in these continuing times of austerity? Apparently this year £1,200 was paid to have a reindeer walk around the streets for a couple of hours when the lights were switched on.

Is this an essential and responsible use of public funds at this time of cut backs and reduced services?

Multiply this type of expenditure across the city parishes and ask what saving could be made, if Christmas could be celebrated in our towns and villages by using more imagination and less public money.

3. Why are you proposing to freeze council tax. You are allowed to increase it by up to 2% & if you did this you could protect some services that you are proposing to cut.

4. Feedback from AWAZ Cumbria – [copy letter dated 8 January 2013 attached](#)
  
5. Feedback from Cumbria County Council – [copy letter dated 18 December 2012 attached](#)
  
6. Sirs. May I suggest one way of reducing the budget would be by, reducing the number of councillors. Three per ward is not necessary. Also only allowing councillors to sit on either the City Council or the County Council, not both. There is always bound to a conflict of interest.



**Empowers the Voice of Black and Minority Ethnic People and Communities**

To,

Mr. Jason Gooding  
Chief Executive  
Carlisle City Council  
Civic Centre  
Carlisle  
CA3 8QG

E-mail: [communications@carlisle.gov.uk](mailto:communications@carlisle.gov.uk), [chiefexec@carlisle.gov.uk](mailto:chiefexec@carlisle.gov.uk)

Dated: 08 January 2013

Our Ref: AWAZ/080113/CCC

**Re: Carlisle City Council Budget Consultation -2013-14**

Dear Mr. Jason Gooding

AWAZ Cumbria has reviewed the proposals set out in the Carlisle City Council Executives Budget Proposals 2013/14 issued for public consultation on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2012. The public consultation document is very technical and does not provide any clear indication in an easy to read format how each proposal affects the members of all communities living, working, studying or conducting business in Carlisle.

AWAZ has concerns and we are disappointed to note that the Council did not make any effort to engage meaningfully with the members of Black and Minority Ethnic Communities or organisations. Despite knowing that the service satisfaction level among BME communities is very low; 39.5% BME people considers Carlisle City Council services as poor, 13 % as average and only 47% as good<sup>1</sup>. We are not aware of any community engagement activity before arriving at these budget proposals or in assessing the impacts of these proposals on BME communities. The timescale for full public consultation is also very short and does not meet the HM Govt. Code of Practice on consultation<sup>2</sup> recommended consultation criteria, (BERR, 2008:4).

The council has not provided meaningful information within the budget consultation document or on the council website at the budget consultation page with regards to the impact of these budget proposals on all or any protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

This lack of provision of relevant information contradicts with the council's commitment:

*"Publishing relevant equality information will make the Council transparent about its decision-making processes and accountable to service users. It will give the public the information they need to hold the Council to account for its performance on equality,"* (Annual Equalities Report 2011-12, p.4).

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<sup>1</sup> See, Customer Complaints and Service Satisfaction 2011/12, [Online], Available at:

[http://www.carlisle.gov.uk/council\\_and\\_democracy/equality\\_and\\_diversity/reporting.aspx](http://www.carlisle.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/equality_and_diversity/reporting.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> See HM Government Code of Practice on Consultation, [online], Available at; <http://www.bis.gov.uk/files/file47158.pdf>



**Empowers the Voice of Black and Minority Ethnic People and Communities**

## **AWAZ Cumbria comments on Budget Proposal**

- 1- AWAZ Cumbria has concerns that there is no explicit demonstration in the text or in the context of the Budget proposals that before making these proposals for public consultation due regard has been given to the General Equality Duty s.149 of Equality Act 2010 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>) and how Carlisle City Council would meet the three aims of the General Equality Duty through these proposal within the limits of these Executive's Budget proposals 2013/14?
- 2- The full Equality Impact Assessment following on from public consultation on Budget 2012/13 has not been made available along with the consultation documents on the Council website to demonstrate how this Council has mitigated any negative impacts of last year budget savings. In AWAZ view, provision of an overarching equality impact assessment could have increased the confidence of BME people that the Council will give due regard to race equality after this consultation on budget proposals 2013/14.
- 3- The copy of initial overarching Equality Impact assessment on Budget proposals for 2013/14 hasn't been made available and published along with consultation documents. If it has been done why it was not published along with the budget consultation documents? Could you provide a copy of your overarching EIA on 2013/14 budget proposals?

Without looking at this initial assessment it is very difficult for members of the BME communities and AWAZ Cumbria to make informed observations on the Executive Budget proposals 2013/14 and provide an informed feedback.

In order to provide meaningful feedback, and understand fully the impacts of Executives Budget Proposals 2013/14 on Black and Minority Ethnic Communities (BME), and Voluntary and Community organisations; AWAZ Cumbria seeks following information;

Does the Council assess the impact of Executives Budget Proposals 2013/14 on members of BME Communities? If the Council have assessed the impact, could you please provide us a copy of the Council's assessment?

What is the Council's total proposed grants budget for Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations for 2013/14?

What is the average spending of total grants budget on the BME VCS organisation during 2012-13 and what is the Council's expected spending for 2013-14?

What are the exact proposed changes in funding through grants and contracts to the BME VCS organisation for the year 2013-14?

How the Council differentiate and monitor grants and contracts funding for BME VCS organisations within overall grants budget from grants funding to other organisations such as Parish and Town Councils etc.?



**Empowers the Voice of Black and Minority Ethnic People and Communities**

Have the Council completed an Impact assessment of Council's proposed changes in funding through grants and contracts to BME Voluntary and Community sector and their service users'? If the Council have assessed the impact could you please provide us a copy of your assessment?

When will the Council publish the full Equality Impact Assessment on the proposed changes in grants and contracts with BME voluntary and Community sector organisations?

How will Council demonstrate and ensure that the Council's proposed changes in grants/ contract funding for VCS organisations are not disproportionately impacting upon BME voluntary and Community sector, and the Council is meeting the three aims of Public Sector Equality Duty<sup>3</sup> and Best Value Statutory Guidance<sup>4</sup> when implementing the proposed reductions in the grants/contracts budget for Black and Minority Ethnic VCS organisations?

We would welcome an early response and hope that your answers to above questions will help us in understanding better the Executive's Budget Proposals 2013/14. This will enable us to provide an informed additional response to the budget consultations.

Yours Sincerely,

Sardar Aftab Khan  
Development Officer  
AWAZ Cumbria

Tel: 0789056902

E-mail: [Aftab@awaz.info](mailto:Aftab@awaz.info)

Dated: 08-01-2013

Cc.

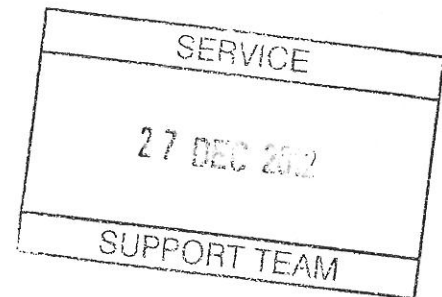
- 1- Professor Cllr. Joe Hendry  
Leader of the Council  
E-mail: [joeh@carlisle.gov.uk](mailto:joeh@carlisle.gov.uk)
  
- 2- Cllr. Dr. Les Tickner  
Portfolio Holder Resources  
E-mail: [LesTi@carlisle.gov.uk](mailto:LesTi@carlisle.gov.uk)

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<sup>3</sup> For further information please see, <http://www.11kbw.com/articles/docs/PSEDMarch2012.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> For further information on Best Value Statutory Guidance visit  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/5906/1976926.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5906/1976926.pdf)

Date: 18 December 2012  
Your reference:  
Our reference:



Peter Mason  
Director of Resources  
Carlisle City Council  
Civic Centre  
Carlisle  
Cumbria  
CA3 8QG

Dear Peter

### **Local Support for Council Tax Scheme**

I am writing on behalf of Cumbria County Council to comment on Carlisle City Council's proposals for the use of discretions on Council Tax discounts for empty properties and second homes, based on the report to Carlisle City Council's Executive on 19<sup>th</sup> November.

In my letter of 29<sup>th</sup> August I explained that the County Council understood the difficulties in implementing schemes for Local Support for Council Tax and the hardship that would result if additional costs were passed on to those least able to pay additional Council Tax. However, to manage the funding pressures that would result, District Councils were encouraged to use the technical changes to Council Tax discounts to mitigate this pressure as far as feasible. This position was formalised in the Draft Budget report to the County Council's Cabinet on 6<sup>th</sup> December which included the following criteria for responding to District Councils' budget consultations:

- Encourage District Councils to maximise the use of mitigations to meet the unfunded costs of local council tax support schemes;
- Encourage all Districts to reduce Council Tax discounts for second homes to 0%;
- Agree that the second homes income-sharing agreement is not extended to include the additional income from reducing the second homes discount to 0%;
- Suggest that District Councils seek to involve the County Council in the agreement of discretionary discounts, in recognition of the impact on its income;
- Ensure that District Councils confirm that in the light of their proposals to replicate the current scheme of council tax benefit they will apply, on behalf of the County Council, for the Transitional Grant for 2013/14;

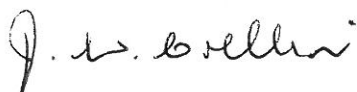
- Ask District Councils to work with the County Council to review in-year Council tax collection rates to evaluate the actual impact of the new arrangements;

The report to Carlisle City Council's Executive forecasts that the City Council's proposed revisions to Council Tax Discounts might raise £747,000 for the County Council and Police, which equates to £645,000 for the County Council. Of this, more than half is shown to be from reduced discounts for properties empty for less than six months, a significant proportion of which may be from social housing and which may continue to be exempt<sup>1</sup>. It therefore seems that the amount raised is likely to be significantly less than the forecast £736,000 cost to this Council of Carlisle's Local Council Tax Support scheme reported to your Executive on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

Carlisle City Council is the only Cumbrian district proposing to retain the 10% discount for second homes, which most other districts are planning to reduce it to nil. In the context of the net cost of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme the County Council would expect, in particular, that this discount would be reduced to nil. It is also noted that Carlisle City Council is the only Cumbria District not proposing to apply an overall premium on properties empty for more than two years. The County Council would hope to see discounts reviewed regularly so they might more closely match the loss of Council Tax through the scheme of Local Council Tax Support. This would also align more strongly with the economic growth argument for bringing empty homes back into use.

The County Council recognises that these discounts go some way to offset the costs of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme but encourages the City Council to keep them under review with a view to making some further progress in this area. The County Council will review the financial impact from the uncertainties surrounding the Local Council Tax Support Schemes and the Business Rate Retention Scheme during 2013/14.

Yours sincerely



Julie Crellin  
Assistant Director (Finance)

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<sup>1</sup> Charitable organisations are exempt under Class C (Properties empty up to 6 months) and this could include social housing organisations