

Budget Scrutiny Working Group

Response to Cabinet

The Budget Scrutiny Working Group (BSWG) has given detailed consideration to the proposals made by the Cabinet for the Budget in 2014/15. The BSWG would like to thank the Cabinet Members and officers who attended the meetings of the BSWG for their time and their open and honest responses to the questions and challenges posed by the group.

The BSWG recognises that the challenge facing the authority this year and in future years is on an unprecedented scale. The role of the BSWG is not to draw up an alternative budget, rather the approach of the BSWG has been to recognise that difficult decisions will have to be made, and to try to provide a "critical friend" viewpoint, to ensure the reductions in budgets and the reductions in service have been fully thought through, and the implications carefully weighed up across the whole of the budget. Members sought not to express views for or against individual proposals, but it should be noted that the views expressed by the BSWG as a body do not necessarily reflect individual views on all proposals.

The minutes of each of the meetings of the BSWG have been provided to the Cabinet members and the Executive Directors in order that the full set of comments could be considered. This report draws together the key findings and messages of the BSWG.

1. The extensive efforts undertaken by staff at all levels to find efficiencies – reducing costs without affecting services – have had a major impact and are warmly welcomed by the BSWG. Staff who have contributed via the "10% challenge" must be thanked for their efforts and their contribution.
2. A number of the proposals in relation to adult social care have been the subject of extensive challenge in other O&S Committees. This level of engagement is supported and appreciated, given the often very vulnerable nature of the people who will be affected. Monitoring the progress and implementation of these proposals is important, and should continue to be done through the appropriate channels, including overview and scrutiny. Given the scope of these changes it is important to ensure that the broader membership of the council is kept informed of developments.
3. The BSWG recognised that, in some areas of the council's work, there exists what was termed "a plethora of partnerships". Whilst undoubtedly these partnerships would have originally been created with good intentions, there appears to be significant areas of overlap. The BSWG welcomes the acknowledgement of this, and supports efforts to rationalise the council's partnerships across all services, recognising that this will bring savings in administration and management costs, whilst emphasising the importance of retaining the positive outcomes that have come out of successful partnerships

and the importance of mechanisms to support integration of services and the sharing of resources.

4. A number of proposals impact directly on schools and schools budgets, including proposals around CYP traded services, the review of early years services and responsibilities, and changes to school crossing patrol funding. The BSWG welcomes the positive approach taken by schools and the county council to discussions on these proposals, and recognises the need to maintain the excellent working relationships built up over many years to make sure the optimal balances are struck on schools and education budgets.
5. Progress made in recent years on attainment levels for Children Looked After was noted. Particular care must be exercised to ensure that steps to restructure the Virtual School do not adversely impact on this vulnerable group of children and young people.
6. The BSWG recognises the significant public concern expressed about the proposals to review bus subsidies. The BSWG recognises the current difficulties, and welcomes discussions with commercial bus operators about new models of provision. The BSWG anticipates that Cabinet will take into account all the responses to the consultation before making its final decisions, and requests that cabinet consider the option of reviewing evening and weekend services as part of a full review of each service, to involve local members and communities, on an individual basis as and when contracts approach expiry. The BSWG would also welcome efforts to involve public health partners in consideration of services to hospitals and which otherwise support the aims of improving health and wellbeing in the county.
7. The current Winter Service was recognised as having developed into an excellent service in recent years. Concern was expressed that budget proposals in this area should not compromise the ability of the county council to effectively keep Lancashire's road network open, particularly when there are abnormal adverse weather events. The continuing recognition of the differing needs of different parts of the County for this service was welcomed.
8. It is suggested that consideration be given to delegating responsibility for decisions on Local Initiative Fund (LIF) grants to 3 Tier Forums to ensure local involvement in decisions and also encourage joint working and the pooling of grant funding with districts. The BSWG would support any efforts which would enable the current level of Local Member Grants to be maintained.

Given the scale of the challenge that the council continues to face, members of the BSWG felt it would be appropriate and beneficial for the group to continue to meet throughout the year. Further work on how the BSWG can most appropriately engage with budgetary issues, without causing any overlap with other member bodies involved in the management, monitoring and scrutiny of the council's changing policies and budget provision will be undertaken.

Notes**Appendix A**

Membership – County Councillors:

Alyson Barnes (Chair); Lorraine Beavers; Geoff Driver; Stephen Holgate; Liz Oades; Alan Schofield; Bill Winlow

The BSWG held six meetings:

Date	Topics	In attendance
12 Nov 13	Planning and Scoping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jo Turton, Interim Chief Executive
28 Nov 13	Adult Services, Health and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Councillor Azhar Ali, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing • Stephen Gross, Executive Director ASHW
10 Dec 13	Children and Young People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Councillor Matthew Tomlinson, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools • Louise Taylor, Executive Director CYP
17 Dec 13	Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Councillor John Fillis, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport • County Councillor Janice Hanson, Cabinet Member for Public Protection and Waste • County Councillor Marcus Johnstone, Cabinet Member for Environment, Planning and Cultural Services • Steve Browne, Acting Executive Director for the Environment • Shaun Capper, Assistant Director Lancashire Highway Services • Rick Hayton, Assistant Director, Strategic Network Management • Tony Moreton, Assistant Director, Sustainable Transport • Sue Procter, Assistant Director, Highways Operations
20 Jan 14	Office of the Chief Executive, Corporate, Property and updates on ASHW and Environment proposals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Councillor Jennifer Mein, Leader of the Council • County Councillor David Borrow, Deputy Leader of the Council • Jo Turton, Interim Chief Executive • Gary Pearse, Assistant Director of Property • Stephen Gross, Executive Director ASHW • Steve Scott, Head of Waste Management • Ray Worthington, Head of Asset Management and Procurement
27 Jan 14	Updates on ASHW and Environment proposals Conclusions and preparation of the final response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stephen Gross, Executive Director ASHW • Tony Moreton, Assistant Director, Sustainable Transport • Sue Procter, Assistant Director, Highways Operations

The BSWG was supported throughout by George Graham, Deputy County Treasurer