

Consultation with Business Ratepayers

10 February 2015

- Peter Scopes – Lion Walk Shopping Centre
- Dave Robertson – Culver Square
- Matthew Swan – Colchester Chamber of Commerce
- James Cracknell – Colchester Business Enterprise Agency
- Carl Milton – W&G

For CBC

Cllr Paul Smith (PS)
Sean Plummer, Strategic Finance Manager
Steve Heath, Finance Manager
Nigel Myers, Enterprise Manager (NM)

Issues raised by businesses on the budget:

- Car Parking charges

Total annual revenue generated by Colchester Borough Council (CBC) from car parking of c£3.4m. Forecast a drop in this revenue of £300k in 2015/16. Latter due in part to the new Park & Ride for which Essex County Council (ECC) will receive the income.

- Investment in the Town Centre

Budget has allowed £400k for town centre improvements funded through New Homes Bonus. This money has not yet been allocated for specific projects. CBC anticipates that this money will be used to secure additional match funding and leverage of additional investment. Further new funding of c£100k over 2 years allocated for the relocation and development of the market.

Question raised whether these funding decisions would change if the administration changes. It was explained that Full Council would need to make changes to the budgets however it was understood that no amendments to the 15/16 budget were being tabled.

- 'Town Team'

The Town Team brings together businesses and the public sector to drive the delivery of the Council's Better Town Centre vision (see 1)

- Leisure World

Leisure World moving towards a breakeven point (expenditure versus income). Recognises that there will continue to be some element of cross subsidy for

community uses. Point raised that CLW self service areas need to be further improved.

- Delivering Savings and Commercialisation of CBC services

Continuing reductions in the government grant to CBC necessitates further efficiency savings and commercialisation of services. The latter is currently focussed on Cemeteries & Crematorium, Community Alarms & Building Services. Commercial Manager appointed to drive the delivery of a £1m/pa target and cultural changes to the way CBC does business.

The question was asked that given the level of efficiency savings and incomes delivered over recent years, how much more could be achieved? It was explained that the budget forecast for later years already included further savings and income and that it was still expected that more would need to be found to balance future budgets.

Figures on income across CBC were presented, however, it was highlighted that to give a more realistic position costs should also be shown to give a trading position.

- Trade Waste

Experience in a number of towns indicates that private trade waste collection is half the cost of the local Council service. Opportunity to develop the service with other major users such as the University of Essex and for upcycling schemes. NM to raise with Graham Lewis (Commercial Manager).

- New Homes Bonus

Colchester has secured a positive grant settlement in recognition of the housing growth in the borough. Question asked whether this will continue if there is a change of government. No commitment or guarantee can be given that this would not happen. It was highlighted that this remained a financial risk for CBC.

- Business Rates (National Non Domestic Rate - NNDR)

Business rates are now a major risk for CBC in that it has to meet part of the cost of losses. Further provision has been made in 2014/15 to cover this risk. CBC has no visibility of the rating appeal process.

CBC is seeking ways to retain more of its business rates by joining an Essex Business Rates Pool, with the aim that more NNDR income will be kept within Essex.

The level of small business rates relief is high in Colchester and is now an automated process – businesses receive it without having to apply. This helps smaller businesses in the town centre and the borough with a rateable value of less than £6k.

- Affordable Housing

CBC has built and is building new social housing. This has helped local families to obtain houses and has enabled people, to move through the housing chain.

- Economic Growth

The new strategy for delivering economic growth in the borough from 2015 to 2021 will focus on jobs, skills and infrastructure to create new businesses and help & retain our existing businesses. CBC will proactively source new funding and investment into the borough from both the public and private sectors. Recognise the need to improve the infrastructure including faster broadband and mobile connectivity and to promote the Colchester 'offer' to inward investors. Also recognise the need to make it much easier for businesses to access information on funding and support. NM to address with Essex County Council Head of Commissioning.

- Council Strategy (new)

PS outlined the new CBC Strategic Plan to achieve the ambitions for the Borough of Colchester. The point well made by our business partners was that this must include the celebration of our unique history and heritage.

(1) **Bringing you a better town centre ...**

The cultural and economic heart of the Borough will continue to be Colchester's town centre. It will be an even better place for people; a place where local people, business people and visitors want to be.

A place that's more accessible with a greater choice of things to see and do for all tastes and ages, during the day, in the evening and into the night.

Colchester will be a cleaner place with interesting buildings and streets, where people feel safer and more comfortable and where people can walk and cycle more easily.

It will continue to be a place for enterprise with a rich mix of businesses which thrive in reality as well as on-line, providing people with jobs and purpose.

All this will enhance Colchester's image, reputation and competitiveness in the world and provide a firmer platform for future growth, opportunity and local pride.