

## Appendix 6

### Response to Select Commission 3 Budget Proposals 2011 – 2012

#### Recommendation

1. That the Select Commission recommends for alternative and additional savings within the General Fund be considered by Cabinet (paragraphs 4.2 and 4.3 refer) and that the decision on the closure of Meden Sports Centre be deferred until after the Leisure Management Options report due in summer 2011.

#### Response:

#### Alternative and additional savings:

Cemetery charges – whilst I would prefer not to increase charges for burials by this substantial amount; the Council is required to ensure equality in charging between residents of the district and those from other areas; it must also take account of the current subsidy of £73,000 made by Council Tax payers for this service and importantly make provision for a substantial investment in additional cemetery land over the next 4 - 5 years. The initial increase in 2011/2012 will eliminate the subsidy, provide equal charging policies and I am proposing that the increase in 2012/2013 be set aside for the development of additional cemetery land.

In order to address these issues, the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection has analysed a number of pricing options and his recommendation is included within the Fees and Charges report which accompanies the budget proposals.

In relation to offering free burials to still-born and for children under the age of 2 years; whilst I appreciate the sensitivity of this issue, I will not be including this in my recommendation for the budget. Again the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection has undertaken detailed research into the impact of this proposal, taking account of current arrangement between Kings Mill hospital and the crematorium, the impact on the availability and future requirement for additional land to accommodate a significant potential increase in burials and the comparable charging structure of other local authorities in the area where Mansfield District Council's charges are generally lower.

As Select Commission 3 points out, this currently affects a relatively low number of burials, approximately 10% of still born, unviable fetuses and children under the age of 2 years (how many?). The potential for a substantial proportion of the remaining 90% becoming burials at nil cost would have a major impact on the space available within predominantly Mansfield Cemetery and for the lifespan of any future cemetery ultimately developed.

## **Garden waste collection**

There is a substantial income to be generated from the introduction of charging for green or garden waste as is already done in a number of our neighbouring authorities and we felt that this option should be consulted on due to the pressure on the council's resources and reduction in government grant.

We need also to take account of the impact this would have on the Council's recycling rates and operationally be able to deal with providing additional bins, moving existing bins to other areas, collecting and storing bins no longer required and collecting payments.

I welcome Select Commission's endorsement of the principle of introducing charges for this service and will ask officers to assess the operational requirements and undertake consultation with the public before the 2012/2013 budget at which time a decision will be made. However, I do not intend to recommend the introduction of charges for 2011/2012.

## **Overtime savings**

Overtime payments can be a useful tool to be able to deal flexibly with unexpected events or peak service demand. However, I agree that overtime should be closely controlled and centrally monitored in order to reduce the overall reliance on it.

The draft budget proposals included a saving of £100,000 on a budget of £530,000 equating to almost 19%. I believe that a further saving of £150,000 proposed by the Select Commission would provide a serious risk to the continual provision of services in key areas; however my recommendations will include an increase in savings required from overtime of £80,000 and will ask managers to undertake a full review of overtime requirements and staffing capacity to inform budget proposals for 2012/2013. I would welcome Select Commissions involvement in this review.

## **Palace Theatre / museum reduction in deficit**

I feel that there are opportunities to generate additional income through the excellent facilities the Council has at the Palace Theatre and the Museum which provide much to the local economy. I agree with the recommendation that an initial reduction of £61,000 should be sought. I also agree with Select Commission that further reducing the deficit this should be a topic for overview and scrutiny during 2011/2012.

## **M.A.S.P. (Mansfield Strategic Partnership)**

I do agree that savings should be sought from MASP however; a review of the Council's future involvement and contribution is underway at present. I have not included these savings within my recommendations at this stage.

### **Occupational Health**

The Occupational Health service is necessary to minimise the risk to the Council and its employees. It includes elements for Hand / Arm vibration assessments to reduce the risk of Vibration White Finger and other similar ailments. It also includes Audio assessments, again to minimise the risk of hearing problems in future years. The Council is required to provide these and whilst this is to the benefit of employees concerned it is also a major factor in reducing the risk of industrial illness / injury claims in the future. We have seen an increase in these in recent years.

The service is also a major factor in helping the council to manage the level of sickness amongst its employees, particularly for long term sickness and regular sickness where managers refer employees to occupational health for independent medical assessments and help in managing their condition.

I understand that the contract to provide this service is currently being reviewed and will be re-tendered in September 2011, at which time the specification for the service will be reassessed.

The proposal within the budget to recharge the cost of missed appointments to service areas should help in reducing the frequency of these, however as this is a transfer within the Council's overall budget I will not be recommending this saving although the recharge will be implemented.

In terms of the Council providing a private health scheme, this is clearly not the case; we do at times provide information to employees on private schemes and discounts available, however, it is the employee's decision whether they wish to take up these schemes and the Council has no involvement.

### **Deferral of closure of Meden Sports Centre**

This has been an issue throughout this year and one which deserves to be fully considered.

The Portfolio Holder for the Environment took the decision during the summer in relation to closing the pool, but deferred implementation to allow Save our Swimming (SOS), to provide a business case for saving the pool. This was received by the 3 December deadline to enable officers to assess the viability of the proposals. This deadline was set to enable decommissioning of the pool should the decision be made to continue.

This assessment has been completed and unfortunately the document is not felt to be sufficiently robust to justify changing the decision made by the Portfolio Holder for the Environment.

A number of actions have been put in place in order to close the pool at the end of March including, giving notice to Nottinghamshire County Council on the lease; starting to reallocate schools, clubs and lessons to Rebecca Adlington centre and consulting with employees on changes to the staffing structure. Deferring the closure would impact on these actions, directly affecting users and employees at the centre.

The proposal within the draft budget is to also close the dry side and I understand arrangements are already being discussed for the Meden school to take over the facility and possibly continue a level of community usage.

As Select Commission has pointed out, not closing the dry side would require additional savings of £65,000 to be identified and a further £70,000 by not continuing with the previous decision to close the pool, at total of £135,000.

I also need to consider that Select Commission 3 is proposing a deferment of any decision until the outcome of the Leisure options procurement is known, which is due in the Autumn of 2011. The procurement exercise does allow for any potential contractor to bid including and excluding Meden, however the specification for the contract does place responsibility for major capital works on the Council and we are aware that a significant investment would be required in the structure of the building and in the near future for the Air Handling Unit.

At this stage, I am not proposing to recommend any change to the previous decision to close the pool nor to the proposals within the draft budget report in respect of closing the dry side. However, should resources become available to defer the decision until the outcome of the Leisure Options procurement I would be willing to revisit this at that time.

### **Car parking charges to employees**

I asked Select Commission for its view on this issue as I realised the additional impact of this suggestion on employees already subject to significant changes in their terms and conditions, organisational restructures within their services as well as the impact of a pay freeze in 2010/2011 and again for 2011/2012. However, the impact on employees needed to be set against the potential income of £66,000 and the resultant impact on services elsewhere within the authority and to the residents of the district.

I am grateful for Select Commission's views and in light of these I am not proposing to recommend the introduction of these charges for the 2011/2012 budget.

### **Reduction in the Executive by 1 portfolio holder**

The decision on the size of the executive is solely within the gift of the Executive Mayor and a reduction at this stage could not be guaranteed in the future as the executive could be up to 10 members.