

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE 25 MARCH 1999

NOTE: A full copy of the reports mentioned below have been sent to all members of the Community Services Committee and other members who have requested it. Any queries on this report to: Joan Blake, Room 222, County Secretary's Department, County Hall, Hertford. (Tel: 01992 555560).

1. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING STATEMENT 1998/99 – FOR PERIOD FROM 1 APRIL TO 31 JANUARY 1999

Each of the Council's committees receive regular budget monitoring reports throughout the year, which highlight significant underspends or overspends compared to the budget, and discuss proposals for managing the variations that arise.

The budget monitor reported to the committee for the period to the end of January indicated the following projected position.

	Latest Approved Budget £,000	Projected Spend at Year End £,000	Projected (Under)/ Overspend £,000	Carry Forwards Requested £,000
Fire & Rescue	21,525	21,284	(241)	191
Fire Pensions	3,327	3,077	(250)	
Community Information	15,274	15,372	98	
Youth	5,016	5,054	38	
Registration	606	586	(20)	20
Coroners	559	659	100	
Other*	137	(62)	(199)	205
TOTAL	46,444	45,970	(474)	416

*Other services include Emergency Planning, Gypsy Service and the Rent Officer Service

The latest forecast of the cost of fire service pensions in 1998/99 indicates a

saving of £250,000 as the number of retirees leaving in the year is less than expected and the service has been a net receiver of transfer values relating to officers moving to Hertfordshire from other areas.

Since the last monitoring report to Committee, further savings in Community Information Directorate and in the Youth Service have been identified which reduce the previously projected overspends for these services by a total of £143,000, leaving projected overspends of £98,000 and £38,000 respectively.

The Coroners' Service is expected to overspend by £100,000 partly due to new mortuary fees being charged by one of the NHS Trusts, and partly due to an increase in the number and costs of inquests. Further work is being undertaken regarding the underlying trends within the service to determine what budgeting pressures are likely to arise in future years.

Within the Gypsy Service, uncertainty over the future of the Halfhide Lane site means that plans for the use of the budget for site upgrades have been delayed, and provision will need to be carried forward to fund works during 1999/2000.

The position on the Committee's 1998/99 capital budget indicated that, compared to an approved budget of £2.265m, spending during the year is estimated to be £1.547m because some of the programmed schemes will not be completed within this financial year. Slippage of £395,000 is projected, the most significant element being slippage of £223,000 relating to the Fire and Rescue Service's IT development and communications project which is ongoing.

Changes in the proposed response to the outcome of the Fire Cover Review mean that budgetary provision set aside in 1998/99 for a new retained station in London Colney will not be required for this purpose. The revised fire cover review proposals for St Albans and Watford involve schemes that are potentially self-financing. However this will not be clear until full estimates have been developed and there may be a funding shortfall or, at least, a cash flow requirement if spending is required before receipts can be realised. For these reasons, the Committee requested that Policy Committee consider the establishment of a specific reserve of £323,000 to assist with any cash flow or funding shortfall that may emerge, once the revised costs of the schemes are determined.

2 REPORT ON THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION AND LIBRARY SERVICES - PUBLIC CONSULTATION FEBRUARY 1999

At its meeting on 24 November 1998, the County Council resolved that the following principles for the future development of information and library services (previously agreed by the Community Services Committee) should be the subject of countywide consultation and public discussion:-

- a) The pattern of service points should take account of the settlement patterns of the county and aim to give equality of access to all.
- b) Premises should comply fully with the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995.
- c) Fixed service points should not be further than 250 metres from the centre of a community or a major community focal point.
- d) Tenure should be flexible enough to allow a change of location to reflect shifting retail and leisure provision in town centres.
- e) Partnerships both within HCC and with other agencies should be actively sought to add value to the service provided and to share property costs.
- f) Resources should not be used to make incremental improvements to buildings which remain fundamentally unsuitable despite those improvements. Buildings should be chosen to maximise security, ease of maintenance and management, flexibility of layout and suitability for ICT. Listed buildings, or those with similar restrictions, should neither be retained nor acquired.
- g) New forms of access should be trialled to develop information provision for the 21st Century in line with the recommendations of "New Library: The People's Network".

The consultation has now taken place and has demonstrated a very high level of public support for innovation in future library service delivery, albeit not at the expense of the core book services which were highly valued by all groups .

Over 10,000 users and non-users of the service were invited to participate and responses were received from 8,310 people, which represented a 78.7% take-up. To ensure the consultation was conducted to approved national standards, the project team of library staff worked in conjunction with MORI and HCC Strategy and Consultancy, and used the UK Public Library User Survey methodology.

Having taken into account the qualifications voiced as part of the consultation process, the Committee have adopted the principles and asked that pilot schemes to develop the service be produced for further consideration. In addition, they requested production of an annual consultation plan to be brought forward in conjunction with proposals for the development of Library User Panels.

P V Goggins
Chairman
County Hall
Hertford
25 March 1999