

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT  
COUNCIL BUDGET 2010 – 2011  
(Report by the Head of Democratic and Central Services)**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report provides the Panel with an opportunity to determine its approach to responding to proposals submitted by the Liberal Democrats for amendments to the Council's budget 2010 – 2011.

**2. THE PROPOSALS**

- 2.1 At the full Council meeting on 17th February 2010, the Liberal Democrats submitted proposals for amendments to the budget 2010 – 2011. It was decided that the proposals should be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) for consideration. A summary of the proposals is attached as an Appendix hereto.
- 2.2 The Panel is invited to consider how to examine the proposals with a view to making a formal response to the Council.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Report submitted to the Council on 17th February 2010.

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***Council has requested that the following matters put forward by the Liberal Democrat group should be referred to this Overview & Scrutiny Panel for further consideration.***

**Liberal Democrat amendments for the Huntingdonshire District Council budget 2010 – 2011**

**Introduction** Huntingdonshire District Council faces financial difficulties and uncertainties. These have been clearly outlined in the papers provided for Members. We recognise that more difficult decisions lie ahead. We consider that more savings should be made early. Our proposed amendments offer mainly minor savings but should not be dismissed simply for that. Minor savings accumulate. The following amendments to the budget are offered in response to requests from the Executive Member, Terry Rogers, for cost-cutting and money-saving ideas and these are contained in Part A of this paper. In Part B we propose some investment to offset the potentially damaging effects of the MTP proposals and to meet HDC objectives and priorities.

**Part A – savings**

**1. Members' Allowances (page 47) Reduce expenditure on Members**

HDC employees are facing a difficult time. Pay improvements will be limited or non-existent. Over the next 3 or 4 years job losses cannot be ruled out. Members should be prepared to share in these difficulties. We propose that the review of Member Allowances should take place in-house, thus avoiding the **£5,000** fee to the Independent External panel. Three options for reductions are offered:

- a. Cut basic allowance by 5% and SRAs by 10% - saves £31,490
- b. Freeze basic allowance and cut SRAs by 10% - saves £18,560
- c. Freeze all allowances – saves £3,890

Our preferred option is **a.** and, together with the £5,000 saving referred to above saves £36,000

**2. Referred to Employment Panel**

**3. Corporate Services (page 47) Reduce expenditure on 'District Wide' by £21,000**

The six editions of *District Wide* currently cost £42,000. If this were reduced to three editions (Spring, Summer, Autumn) there could be a saving of £21,000. Greater use could be made of the new and improved web-site to disseminate information.

#### **4. Reduction in 'Customer Service' (page 49) – Saving of £30,000**

'Customer First' covers a wide range of services to the public including face-to-face contact, Call centre and web-site. There have been extensive and welcome improvements. Now that we have a refreshed web-site, it ought to be possible to reduce overall expenditure in this area. Officers should be asked to reprioritise to avoid the proposed increase.

#### **5. Democratic representation (page 47) Reduce expenditure on elections by £50,000 over four years**

The present pattern of elections every year except one in four is more expensive than having an all-up election once every four years (which is the pattern in most other authorities). We propose that this issue be reconsidered by the Corporate Governance Panel.

#### **6. Document Centre (page 51) Reduce expenditure by £10,000**

HDC currently spends over £30,000 on paper. Most printed documents have wide margins, blank pages and are not laid out economically. Trials have demonstrated that, by using a different layout (narrower margins, smaller font, less elaborate headings, fewer blank pages), most documents could be reduced to  $\frac{3}{4}$  or even  $\frac{2}{3}$  of their length. If documents were worded more concisely and fewer were sent out by the post savings could be made.

#### **7. Capital budget – saving of £800,000 from Bus station project (page 46)**

The Bus Station improvement, though perhaps desirable, is not essential. An up-grade of the toilet facilities and minor enhancements to the existing fabric could be achieved for £90,000 leaving a saving of £800k for capital reserves (with a knock-on effect on need to borrow and interest income).

### **Part B – investments in improvements**

#### **8. Public Conveniences (page 41) - £7,000 for pilot scheme for alternative provision**

The reduction in the provision of toilets is very unpopular. This gives HDC the opportunity to pilot a scheme which is widely used in Austria (and possibly other European countries) whereby the public is allowed access to toilets in hotels, cafes and restaurants without having to be a paying customer. It is suggested that a payment would be made to any establishment willing to pilot this approach in Huntingdonshire to cover extra costs. This would maintain public access to toilets and be very much less expensive than the previous arrangements and still provide a service people value, especially tourists, families and older people.

**9. Environmental Strategy (page 41) – capital expenditure of £7,000 to stimulate public interest in reducing domestic electricity consumption**

The pilot scheme in Warboys where Smart meters have been available for residents is now being moved on to Somersham. There is evidence to indicate that people change their domestic energy habits quite rapidly once they have experienced the Smart meter. This proposal is for the purchase of 200 Smart meters, rechargeable batteries and charger units to be located in public libraries for free loan to residents.

Huntingdon 50, St Neots 50, St. Ives 30, Ramsey 30, Warboys 10, Buckden 10, Sawtry 10 Somersham 10.

Final confirmation from Cambridgeshire Libraries that they can handle this is anticipated.

**10. Partial protection of the Arts Development service (page 44)**

The proposal that by 2012 there should be no Arts Development Service at all is unacceptable. We propose that some of the above savings be used to maintain a reduced Arts Service. We propose that £70k be added to the budget for 2012-13 and beyond to preserve a basic service.