

Report of:	Meeting	Date	Item no.
Cllr Michael Vincent, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Philippa Davies, Corporate Director of Resources	Cabinet	20 January 2016	8

<p align="center"><b>Lancashire County Council budget proposals – response to consultation</b></p>
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**1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1 To report the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding Lancashire County Councils proposals to Cabinet.

**2. Outcomes**

- 2.1 Feedback provided to Lancashire County Council indicating Wyre's comments on their budget proposals.

**3. Recommendation**

- 3.1 That the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as detailed in this report, be submitted to Lancashire County Council as Wyre Council's contribution to stage one of the budget proposals consultation.

**4. Background**

- 4.1 The council received a letter from County Councillor Jennifer Mein, Leader of Lancashire County Council, dated 10 December 2015, inviting partners to comment on Lancashire County Council's budget proposals. The information in paragraphs 4.2 – 4.4 of this report refer directly to information contained in that letter.

- 4.2 The letter explained that the County Council continues to face an unprecedented financial challenge. An analysis recently conducted based on current spending and forecast demand for services, showed that the County Council would not have sufficient financial resources to meet its statutory obligations by April 2018, even if it no longer continued to deliver any of its non-statutory services. The review also showed that the County Council will need to rely heavily on its reserves in order to set

a balanced budget for 2016/17 and 2017/18.

- 4.3** Over the next five years to 2020/21 Lancashire County Council needs to make savings of £262m on top of those agreed within previous budget processes.
- 4.4** The County Council's Cabinet considered its initial budget proposals for 2016/17 to 2020/21 on 26 November 2015. Organisations and the general public have now been invited to comment on these proposals by 18 January 2016, prior to the meeting of Full Council on 11 February 2016 when the budget is set.
- 4.5** The council understands that there will be a second stage of consultations beginning later in January when the County Council will be consulting in more detail on specific proposals, to which Wyre Council intends to contribute. The consultation process and deadlines afford partners very little opportunity to engage in any positive dialogue or to make fully considered and evidenced responses, which will limit the value of the consultation.
- 4.6** The Overview and Scrutiny Committee convened a special meeting on 7 January 2016 to consider the likely implications of the County Council's budget proposals on the residents of Wyre and to formulate a draft consultation response.
- 4.7** Whilst accepting the fact that local authorities are having to deal with significant financial challenges, which will inevitably result in some cuts, Wyre Council would hope that the number of compulsory redundancies be kept to a minimum and that the impact on any residents of the borough be mitigated. It further hopes that the protection of the public will be maintained at an appropriate level (regarding trading standards and youth offending, for example). These over-arching comments apply to all the County Council's proposals under all the service headings, even where specific reference is not made to a particular service in this response from Wyre.
- 4.8** Numerous references are made in the Lancashire County Council documentation to the use of reserves. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was very disappointed that there was no indication of the extent of the County Council's reserves or the earmarked use of those reserves to meet future redundancy costs. Such information would have assisted the committee with their deliberations.
- 4.9** Councillors also commented on the lack of information and detail in some of the options presented by the County Council, and the consequent difficulty in being able to make meaningful comments on some of the proposals. It would have been helpful to have explanations about the thinking behind some of the proposals, with information about deadlines for their implementation, which would have made it easier to offer helpful suggestions.

**4.10** Wyre Council is seriously concerned that the cumulative effect of the proposed cuts could be devastating to many of Wyre's residents, particularly older residents without good support networks of friends and family and those who are socially isolated or at risk of being so. Whatever can be done to delay the implementation of any of these proposals would be welcomed by the council.

## **5. Responses to budget proposals**

### **5.1 Flood risk**

Members were concerned about any reduction in this area especially in the light of the recent flooding incidents. There should be no cuts at all under this heading until there is a clear indication from the Government about how it intends to address this issue in the medium- and long-term.

### **5.2 Highway management**

There is concern that a reduction in investment in our highways now will result in greater costs in the future. Further cuts will only exacerbate an already unsatisfactory situation.

Many councillors currently receive complaints about the poor state of roads and pavements. A reduction in investment will result in an increase in insurance claims and result in a longer-term increase in overall cost.

The council would like further clarification about what is meant by reducing the frequency of some services "on a needs only basis" and how priorities will change.

### **5.3 School transport**

The council believes that there should be free bus travel to faith schools.

### **5.4 Public health general**

Wyre Council opposes the termination of any of these services. It is hoped that alternative ways of designing and providing these services will be agreed, possibly with the support of the third sector. The loss of any of these services will have an impact on Wyre residents, particularly those who are less well off. Wyre's emphasis on promoting healthy lifestyles would also be undermined, with likely longer-term consequences and costs. Early intervention and prevention is key to reducing costs in the long term.

Councillors were also concerned about cost shunting impacting on other public sector organisations in respect of a number of the County Council's proposals, and for public health and the Youth Offending Team in particular.

## **5.5 Youth Offending Team**

The council is concerned that the service provided by the Youth Offending Team will be reduced, with significant impact upon individuals, Wyre residents and local communities. Options for the pooling of resources should be explored.

## **5.6 Public Transport**

The council strongly opposes the planned cessation of all subsidies for bus services, particularly if this means that the services will no longer run.

All buses to Knott End are subsidised and if they cease there is a very significant risk of many Wyre residents becoming socially isolated. The 2C service, for example, is a particularly crucial link for Knott End residents to get to Blackpool Victoria Hospital, via Poulton-le-Fylde.

The inter-relationship of proposed cuts, including not only the ending of subsidies for bus services but also transport to day centres and the withdrawal of funding for the Knott End Ferry has the potential to be devastating for many people who, particularly in the rural areas, will feel completely abandoned.

Wyre intends to carry out some more detailed analysis of the impact of these budget proposals in time for the second stage of consultation by reviewing information identifying the transport network and the number of passengers travelling.

## **5.7 Libraries service**

The council takes the view that there are a number of different options that should be explored to protect the provision of libraries.

Whilst recognising that 74 libraries is a high number the value of libraries to local communities must not be underestimated. They are much more than simply a source for borrowed books; they provide IT facilities, which are required by some DWP applicants, for example, and they fulfil a valued role in reducing social isolation.

Consideration should be given to hosting libraries in shared buildings in order to maintain the service and reduce costs.

In some parts of the country libraries are run by volunteers and this model should also be considered for Lancashire.

As another example, York's libraries are now run by a new social enterprise to give staff greater scope to work with the local community and more say in how services are delivered.

Whatever the final decision of the County Council, there should be a period during which any community group could have the chance to put a plan together to save a library.

#### **5.8 Cultural services – Lancashire museums**

Fleetwood Museum has been a volunteer-led facility for the past ten years. It has worked well and is a model that could be replicated elsewhere.

Closure of the museum would result in a loss of

- (a) part of the cultural identity of Fleetwood
- (b) a valued educational resource, and
- (c) a tourist attraction

The council takes the view that the closure of the Fleetwood Museum would result in a relatively small saving at a significant cost to Fleetwood and the local community.

#### **5.9 Waste recycling and cost sharing**

The council is concerned that the impact of the withdrawal of cost sharing for waste services will be passed on to its residents via new charges e.g. for the collection of green waste.

#### **5.10 Prevention and early help fund**

Prevention and early intervention should be a fundamental building block for the County Council's strategy; by intervening early savings will be made in the longer term, particularly when one considers that those who become the focus of early intervention are likely to become those who are the heaviest users of publicly funded services.

The council is concerned that vulnerable people will be at risk of being unable to access services that they require.

#### **5.11 Knott End Ferry**

Wyre council notes that the current contract for the Fleetwood to Knott End Ferry runs until March 2017.

The council would strongly oppose the closure of the Fleetwood to Knott End Ferry. The inter-relationship of proposed cuts, including the ending of subsidies for bus services and the cuts to transport to Day Centres, has the potential to be devastating for many people who, particularly in the rural areas, will become isolated.

#### **5.12 Transport to Day Centres**

The council is very concerned about the impact that these proposals will have on social isolation. The council opposes these cuts to services, the effect of which will be exacerbated by the additional proposals to withdraw subsidies to bus routes and close the Fleetwood to Knott End ferry. The council believes that people who are the most vulnerable will be those who will be affected the most. The impact of these proposals will be dramatic for both service users and carers alike.

#### **5.13 Countryside Services**

The council appreciates the need for Lancashire County Council to make cuts but hopes that it will maintain a role in encouraging and coordinating community groups and volunteers to look after as many of the recreation and forestry sites as possible. The council would like to see an organised programme to assist volunteers to take on this role.

Wyre council also expresses concern at the likely impact that the cessation of this service will have upon the health and well-being of the borough's residents.

#### **5.14 Blackpool Tramway**

The council notes that the likely impact of the proposal to cease financial support for Blackpool Tramway maintenance is that it will have a detrimental effect upon the financial viability of the Blackpool tram service. The Blackpool Tramway provides a vital link along the Fylde coast, which is an essential service for local residents, particularly those in Fleetwood, as well as being a valued tourist facility. This proposal should be reconsidered in the light of the wider proposed decimation of transport services already addressed in this report (subsidised bus services, Fleetwood to Knott End Ferry and transport to Day Centres).

#### **5.15 Bus stations**

Councillors were concerned that there was a risk that, with the proposed increase in departure fees, the use of bus stations by bus operators would decrease or cease altogether.

<b>Financial and legal implications</b>	
Finance	There are no financial implications linked to this report.
Legal	There are no legal implications linked to this report.

**Other risks/implications: checklist**

If there are significant implications arising from this report on any issues marked with a ✓ below, the report author will have consulted with the appropriate specialist officers on those implications and addressed them in the body of the report. There are no significant implications arising directly from this report, for those issues marked with a x.

risks/implications	✓ / x
community safety	✓
equality and diversity	x
sustainability	✓
health and safety	x

risks/implications	✓ / x
asset management	x
climate change	x
data protection	x

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<b>List of background papers:</b>		
name of document	date	where available for inspection
Lancashire County Council Budget Proposals: Consultation	Thursday 7 January 2016	<a href="http://www.wyre.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/505/overview_and_scrutiny_committee">http://www.wyre.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/505/overview_and_scrutiny_committee</a>

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