

Voluntary Sector Compact Group (VSCG)
13th December 2006

The VSCG expressed its understanding of the limitations placed on the Council by the currently inadequate financial settlement with central government. The Chair, Colin Stroud from CVS, stated *“we raise these matters with central government whenever we get the chance and especially through our national bodies, notably the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and The National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA). But if there is more that you think we might do, please discuss this with me.”*

He continued *“because of this and other constraints, most VCOs have had no significant growth in their statutory funding for many years, and struggle to cope with their ever-increasing workloads. If the work of these organisations is to continue, we trust you will work with us and other partners to secure the additional funds needed to sustain these valuable services in the community. You are well aware of our concerns about funding from the new PCT, and trust you will support our endeavours to secure an early and satisfactory resolution to this situation.”*

The VSCG were pleased that the council had introduced 3 year funding agreements which provides much needed stability for many organisations and hoped that the authority would be able to encourage other partners to do likewise. The VSCG would appreciate further dialogue on the extension of such agreements to a wider range of bodies and a model which dealt with the inflationary pressures which were faced in years two and three of agreements.

In terms of the forthcoming Local Area Agreement the VSCG were clear that they wished the council to demonstrate how funding will support the development of an effective LAA which fully engaged the voluntary sector. Specific issues related around how planning activity will:

- a. Consider how to achieve the most effective delivery of the priority services, across all sectors.
- b. Review existing arrangements for commissioning services and ensure that these processes are Compact compliant.
- c. Actively seek opportunities to bid for external funding sources to achieve partnership priorities.
- d. Consider the most effective use of LPSA2 reward money to achieve LAA outcomes.
- e. Work to identify and secure specific resources to support voluntary and community sector involvement in the on-going partnership and planning processes, including financial support for voluntary and community sector representatives on partnership boards.

The VSCG also made specific reference to the following.

- a. All members recognised the pressures which the council has faced on social care and were pleased to note that, unlike many other authorities, at this stage

Annex 9 Consultation Responses

no proposals had been brought forward to reduce the eligibility criteria. It was recognised that while achieving this position had taken a number of measures, concern was expressed about the potential impact of HAS15 (Increase Customer Income, £244k) on a small number of individuals. The introduction of a cap on additional costs to individuals was seen as a valuable measure in mitigating these impacts.

- b. On CHS06 the withdrawal of funding from the Workers Educational Association was considered an unfortunate development (£2k).
- c. The VSCG asked that for LCS03 (Events Income Target Increase, £3k) the proposal to make full recovery of costs from community groups be reconsidered due to its disproportionate impact on the bodies involved.
- d. The VSCG also asked members to note that on LCS04 YorKash (£25k reduction for 2007/08 only) that this funding was valued and it was important that it be maintained in future years.

Consultation with Representatives of the Business Community 13th December 2006

Bodies represented: the Retail Forum, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Hospitality Association and the York Archaeological Trust.

A wide ranging discussion was held concerning the short, medium and long term future of the council's budget and the city as a whole. Representatives expressed their appreciation that this meeting was being held earlier in the budget cycle and that the papers provided were more comprehensive than they had been in the past.

Concerns were expressed about the impact of council tax increases on those with low or fixed incomes. This was considered of particular concern should a council tax revaluation be undertaken in the future. Whilst it was recognised that the business rate is a nationally set tax members were asked to note inequities in the rateable values for traditional shops and out of town supermarkets which penalised those operating in urban centres.

In terms of funding it was suggested that more should be made of the low relative level of the council tax in York and concern was expressed that growth in business rate income was not reflected in funding received by the city.

The business community expressed their views that in a number of areas the council was undercharging users of its services and hence not maximising the income available to it. Representatives recognised however that this could be from a variety of sources including the setting of statutory charges by central government and local priorities. They did however believe that the council could benefit from examining those areas where fees have been set at levels below the rate which the market could absorb; low level fees which could cost nearly as much to collect as they yielded; and evaluating whether users could realistically be asked to pay for in advance for services for which they are currently invoiced. Representatives were pleased to note that the council had recognised some of these issues and was currently examining its overall approach to income collection in conjunction with the Easy@York project. As part of this process members of the income collection project team will be in further

contact with representatives to identify specific opportunities and areas of concern that they may have.

Much discussion was centred on the role of a vibrant historic centre as both a tourist destination but also an important part of the package that attracted and retained inward investment. In this light the decision to once again freeze parking charges was welcomed and the importance of a successful new park and ride contract was also noted. Some concerns were however noted. In general terms the representatives wanted to emphasise that promoting a vibrant city started the moment that someone entered the city by car, train or other means, specific issues included:

- a. That reduced investment in conservation particularly in specialist staff will have an impact on the cities historic nature. A solution must be found to maintaining these resources.
- b. Different solutions may be available for the council and stakeholders to work together to preserve and develop many aspects of the historic city. In particular the York Archaeological Trust representative suggested that a much more imaginative approach to the management of the Bar Walls was possible and that they would be very interested in exploring options with the council. It was agreed that this offer would be taken up to identify what options are available for much deeper partnership working in order to achieve a more dynamic presentation of the Bar Walls for visitors.
- c. That the city has been successful in promoting tourism as a good thing for locals but that it now needs to switch its efforts to markets such as North America and China where it has been less successful.
- d. The city centre needs high quality public spaces and public toilets.
- e. The guest markets are a valuable additional to the city's offer but need to be properly invested in (for example the provision of high quality stalls for St. Nicholas Fayre and specialist markets) if medium to long term potential is not to be sacrificed for short term profit.

The representatives also expressed a clear view that there needed to be a changing relationship between the council and the local business community and voluntary sector. Opportunities existed for closer working to address common challenges and the increased flexibility available to those outside of the public sector mean that they may be better placed to deal with specific pressures which the city will face in the future.

The Public and Other Stakeholders

The council has also invited comments from members of the public and other stakeholders, most notably parish councils. For the public a detailed analysis of the financial position for 2007/08 and direct links to all budget EMAP reports (and separate files detailing all savings and growth proposals) was provided on the council's website and promoted through the website and the local media. In the three weeks that the site was running it received 645 hits. Hard copies of the information were also placed in all libraries. For other stakeholders a more technical printed version of the briefing was provided, this was the same briefing as provided to those organisations invited to the business and voluntary consultation meetings.

Annex 9 Consultation Responses

In light of the certainty of grant funding and the restrictions placed by the DCLG on York's council tax increase the aim of this year's consultation was to gain qualitative responses about the specific issues raised. Comments received are summarised below.

- Requests were made for explicit additional investment for youth provision.
- Concerns were expressed that respark charges were being increased penalising residents while those for general car parking were fixed for the benefit of tourists. Some individuals also complained that respark should be provided free of charge.
- A request was also made that the refocusing within culture towards community arts and arts development should not be at the expense of partnership development work.
- Cost saving suggestions included:
 - Reducing the number of directors.
 - Increasing charges for guest markets in Parliament Street.
 - Removal of bus subsidies.
 - Using fixed penalty notices for anti social behaviour and littering.
- Concerns were also expressed about the scale of the council's pensions deficit.
- Further explanation and information was asked for in terms of:
 - Why the levels of council tax in York are so comparatively low?
 - Why there are such large differentials in grant between York and other councils?
 - Why don't savings on landfill tax result in reduced council tax bills?
 - Why can't the council place charge a £1 per person tourist tax on people using the Yorkshire Wheel?
- One Parish Council complained that not only were the documents provided too complex but also that the timescales for consultation were too tight for it to provide meaningful responses.

In addition as with previous years consultation was also undertaken via Talkabout Survey 28 . This resulted in 1,369 responses. To allow for trend analysis this survey asked panel members for opinions on whether the council should spend more, the same, or less on 34 different areas. The proportion supporting each element is then reported (for example on Youth Services 60% wanted the council to spend more, 33% wanted the existing level of expenditure to be maintained whilst 7% wanted it reduced). The top quartile responses for each question are shown below (it should be noted that whilst the preferred savings areas are those that had the highest level of support for funding reductions, such actions were only supported by at most one in five of the respondents).

Annex 9 Consultation Responses

Priorities for Investment

- Creating & maintaining jobs in the area (63%)
- Working with other organisations to reduce crime (63%)
- Recycling facilities (61%)
- Youth services, such as youth clubs (60%)
- Leisure activities for young people (59%)
- Community care services (58%)
- Care homes for elderly and disabled (58%)
- Sports/leisure facilities/events/activities (56%)
- Facilities for older people (50%)

Spend the Same

- Museums & galleries (76%)
- Libraries (74%)
- Park & Ride (69%)
- Trading standards/consumer protection (68%)
- Adult education (67%)
- Household waste sites (67%)
- Local assemblies eg ward committees/parish councils (63%)
- Theatres & concert halls (62%)
- Household waste collection (62%)

Preferred Savings Areas

- Arts events (21%)
- Local assemblies eg ward committees/parish councils (20%)
- Financial aid for evening/Sunday bus services (18%)
- Sports events (17%)
- Provision for cyclists (16%)
- Park & Ride (15%)
- Road accident reduction measures (14%)
- Car parks (14%)
- Communicating with residents (12%)
- Consulting with residents (12%)

In comparing these results to those used for the 2006/07 budget process the following key changes can be seen:

- a. Overall there has been little change in the willingness of individuals to spend more on council services (38% in 2006 compared to 38.2% in 2005). However there has been a shift in terms of those wanting the council to spend less (7.9% in 2006, 9.7% in 2005).
- b. Within this there have been a small number of areas where there have been significant increases in the number of people wanting the council to invest more:
 - Creating and maintaining jobs 63% (47% in 2005)
 - Community care services 58% (48% in 2005)
 - Sport / leisure facilities, events and activities 56% (44% in 2005)
- c. In last year's budget report it was reported that residents viewed waste collection as an area where the council should be increasing investment. However this years survey shows a very different picture with a significant change in respect of perceptions of civic amenity sites and waste collection. In 2005 42% and 48% of respondents wanted the council to spend more in these areas (up respectively from 36% and 27% in 2004), in 2006 these figures have fallen back to 30% and 37% respectively. However only 3% now want the council to spend less on waste sites and 1% want less spent on waste collection. Alongside this 61% want more spent on recycling facilities, a slight drop from 66% a year ago (59% in 2004).

In many ways these views reflect the decisions which the council has taken in previous budget rounds and which are included in this report. For example over recent years the council has invested heavily in various aspects of waste management including the twin bin system and the new household waste and recycling centre at Hazel Court which appear to be influencing views on future investment priorities. On this basis it is probable that the impending roll out of cardboard recycling will reduce future preferences for investment.