

**CULTURAL CONSORTIUM'S COMMENTS ON PORTSMOUTH CITY
COUNCIL BUDGET 2010/11 TO 2014/15 PROPOSALS**

INTRODUCTION

1. This annex sets out the Cultural Consortium's comments on the budget proposals.

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

2. Para 4.v
 - a. We would like an explanation of "Victoria Swimming Centre Site Security - £165,000 - Significant costs have been incurred in making the Victoria Swimming Centre secure prior to demolition. In addition it was necessary to employ 24 hour security guards until all the security arrangements had been put in place. It is proposed that the total estimated costs of these measures amounting to £165,000 be funded from the contingency provision in 2009/10".
 - b. It would seem that had the transition from closure to demolition been better planned, such a huge security budget would have been unnecessary.
3. Para 4.6.
 - a. "Withdrawal of Concessionary Fare Bus Passes for Companions when accompanying Disabled Concessionary Bus Pass/Token holders".
 - b. This will reduce the access of people with such tokens to cultural activities and increase the levels of isolation and loneliness of many such holders. It also discriminates against people holding such tokens.
4. Para 6.8.
 - a. "The Local Strategic Partnership have reviewed the grant allocations and made their recommendations to the Leader of the CouncilIn addition the LSP recommended that £50,000 be allocated to an initiative entitled Family Intervention Programme Plus."
 - b. To our knowledge, not all Partnership Boards were invited to be involved or express a view. We would like to know why this is so.
5. Para 7: Revenue Budget Process 2010/11.
 - a. The council decided in Dec 2009 that "The requirement for the Cabinet to publish its budget proposals prior to the City Council's budget setting meeting be changed from two weeks to one week." And "The requirement that proposed Budget Amendments be published one week in advance of the City Council budget setting meeting be deleted".
 - b. This does not give enough time for adequate scrutiny and consultation in the community, especially amongst the many groups who rarely access or are engaged with councillors. This short timeline does not seem to follow the terms of the Portsmouth Compact, see: http://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/media/Portsmouth_Compact_4pgr.pdf.

What about 7.5 States : “Officers were asked to ensure that all potential savings they put forward were deliverable. To qualify as an efficiency saving, there must be no diminution of service and the saving must be cashable. Ideally the service would be able to achieve additional or more outputs for the same resource.” It is not realistic to think that a portfolio that has already suffered savage cuts over the last 5 years can continue with no diminution of service.

6. Para 7.8

a. States: “As several Heads of Service had failed to achieve their target savings, Officers were instructed to identify additional savings, even if not supported by the Head of Service. As a result, additional savings totalling £3.034m were submitted.”

b. We would appreciate an explanation of why this failure occurred and what action has been put in place (e.g. training, process changes etc) to prevent such failures in the future. It seems strange that officers were instructed to submit savings, thus undermining the line accountability of the Heads of Service.

7. Para 8.3

a. “The Local Strategic Partnership has reviewed the allocation of Area Based Grant for 2010/11 even though this was approved by City Council in February 2009. Savings have been made to the recommended grant allocation”.

b. To our knowledge, not all Partnership Boards were invited to be involved or express a view. We would like to know why this is so.

8. Para 11.2

a. States “Given that the City Council considers that base budgets are deemed to be “about right”, their relativity against each other is also deemed to be ‘about right’. It follows therefore that as a first stage in the planning process, any savings targets should be apportioned pro rata across services”.

b. What operational analysis or decision-making methodology has been used to substantiate the judgement of “about right”? In particular how does the Council assess what is “about right” for cultural services?

9. Para 13.5.

a. “Elsewhere on the Agenda is a report recommending that the former Woolworth's store in Palmerston Road Southsea be acquired and converted for use as a library and access point (to replace the existing library in Elm Grove)”.

b. We would like to know what public involvement and formal consultation has taken place on this. It has not involved the Cultural Consortium.

10. Para 22.2

a. “A budget consultation meeting with a wide range of representatives from the Business Community, Voluntary Sector, Local Strategic Partnership, Portsmouth Pensioners and the Trades Unions took place on 17 November 2009 and gave these groups an opportunity to meet with political Group Leaders and feed their views, comments and ideas into the budget process before any decisions were taken. A

further consultation meeting with these groups is due to take place on 5 February 2010 to review and discuss the proposals contained within this report”.

b. The Cultural Consortium was not aware of this or invited to attend. Information about these consultations cannot be found by searching the PCC website (accessed 2200hrs 3 Feb 2010).

11. Para 26. The statement “the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons and the need to encourage participation by disabled persons in public life. Regard has been given to this responsibility in preparing this report.” is not consistent with “Withdrawal of Concessionary Fare Bus Passes for Companions when accompanying Disabled Concessionary Bus Pass/Token holders” at para 4.6

APPENDIX A

12. The underlying budget deficit from £6M to £22M by 2014 would benefit from an explanation, as would the purpose of this appendix.

APPENDIX B

13. Para A(ii). There is no mention of the Vision for Portsmouth and the LSP Flagship Issues or the current LAA as drivers for the budget.

14. Para C (xxii). “The Cabinet will publish its budget proposals one week prior to the City Council’s budget setting meeting”. This seems a very short period of time to involve or even inform the community. How does this support the statement “Cabinet Members will explore radical ideas for savings as well as seeking efficiency savings” when views of the public have only a week to be gathered, and thus the innovative power inherent in any community is not harnessed. Thus the deficits are probably larger than they need be.

APPENDIX C

15. Key points to note are:

16. Culture and Leisure Portfolio

a. Line 7 – reduction of £9000 to Aspex and SCAT. The impact of “A reduction in outreach services to both communities and schools is anticipated” will also lead to a reduction in access to those perhaps most in need of engaging in culture and will impact their self-esteem. To quote the Director of aspex: “For every £1 Portsmouth City Council invested in aspex in 2009/10 the gallery has brought in £11.82 of economic investment from outside of the city. We cannot underestimate how important this grant is in leveraging this additional funding - money which in the last year has provided over 25,000 people with access to contemporary visual art and craft exhibitions, and has enabled them to work with 27 schools and community groups, involving almost 4000 local people in workshops and projects.”

b. Line 9 – Reduction in Central Library hours on Saturdays. The rationale for reducing hours based on lowest footfall is self-defeating to the end point where it will eventually close on Saturdays. The impact is grossly understated as the library provides important IT facilities, not to mention books etc, which low income people may otherwise not be able to access.

c. Line 10. The reduction of £20K by making a technician redundant and then using external contractors does not make sense, as the contractors will need paying. This will

result in fewer temporary exhibitions and the inevitable degradation of the more permanent displays, which in turn will have a negative impact on visitor numbers.

- d. Line 11. The reduction of £10K by reducing the searchroom team by 0.5 of a FTE post means that the City's records will be 50% less accessible to the public, including schools. The suggestion that impact can be reduced by putting up the cost of research to reduce the number of enquiries is unsubstantiated.
- e. Line 12. Many historic monuments (which fall under the Cultural Portfolio) are in a bad state of repair (eg the fortifications along Old Portsmouth, Square and Round Towers; significant repairs to Southsea Castle are already overdue). Replacing 2 FTE posts with part-timers will seriously jeopardise continuity of high quality maintenance and thus impact negatively the offer. There is also a risk of sanctions from English Heritage as Southsea Castle is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.
- f. Line 13. Reduction of contribution to events by £1000. If there is no impact, then this implies that PCC should ultimately make no contribution to events. Clearly the current £1000 that would have been spent achieves no impact anyway.
- g. Line 14. Reduced promotion of events. The impact eats at the heart of attracting people within the city and from outside the city to events. Already many events have unsustainably low numbers. The knock effects will be reduced attendance and reduced overall cultural vibrancy as well as less access to information for the many that do not have internet access.
- h. Line 16 Admin Support. Yet another Admin post reduction in Culture. This will reduce the ability of the Council to facilitate cultural initiatives and make it more difficult for the public to find out how to arrange, establish, market cultural events involving the public realm. The advisory civic role of Cultural Services is important.
- i. Line 22. Reduction on contract management of parks. The impact statement needs reinforcing. Portsmouth's parks are a significant feature in people's lives and provide respite and a sense of freedom from one of the most crowded cities in UK. The parks are also well admired by visitors. Furthermore, this cut will leave contractors with less supervision and therefore less protection of the use of taxpayers' money.
- j. Lines 23 and 27 regarding converting flower beds to non-flower beds. The negative visual impact is underestimated. The visual attraction of parks is key to increasing visitor numbers and improving the experience for all. Portsmouth's parks are in danger of being non-descript mediocre grass areas.
- k. Line 29. Surely be reducing fertiliser, it will degrade the quality of pitches and send a signal to all players that Portsmouth is not serious about recreational sport.
- l. Line 32. Parks. Reduction in Sports Development Team. This will work against Portsmouth's Flagship issues of reducing obesity, the Healthy Towns ethos and lead to massive ongoing health budgets. A small investment in sport leads to huge savings for taxpayers in terms of better mental, physical health. Has this item been discussed in coordination with Portsmouth PCT?
- m. Line 34. Withdrawal of Sports Initiative Budget. This could threaten some small scale community sports events.
- n. Line 35. Sports. Reduce Sports and Recreation Facilities Maintenance. If Portsmouth aspires to inspire greater participation in sport, this cut will not help, especially with the Olympics in 2012. Sport should be an area of growth.

o. General: The New Theatre Royal’s bid for capital funding towards the refurbishment and extension works should be a focal point for driving Culture, education and well-being forward in the city.

17. Education, Children And Young People Portfolio

a. Line 45. Deleting the Outdoor Education Service.

(1) This saving will, as stated “impact on schools and youth clubs abilities to provide safe and suitable outdoor activities for young people”. The Cultural Consortium VEHEMENTLY opposes this. By taking a more innovative approach, an outdoor education service can be maintained (even if not in house) sustainably. For a city which is so crowded, an outdoor education service is vital to the fabric of our cultural identity and well-being. For Portsmouth not to have an outdoor education service will be disastrous.

(2) If innovation can save the Pyramids, then it can save this service. Outdoor education is a vital part of improving physical and mental health, and cutting this service could lead to increase health support costs.

b. Line 102. Deletion of one Tourism Officer Post, this post is currently located in Cultural Services and promotes the City to bring in additional visitors from a range of markets across the tourism industry. This is one area where promotion needs to be more effective, especially to support PS I LOVE YOU and the PUSH Cultural Strategy.

c. Line 98. Delete Urban Design Officer Post. This means that the Council will have no in-house urban design expertise at a time when major regeneration is planned.

d. Line 128. Admin support to LSP – “now absorbed within team so no additional requirement”. This could mean reduced actual support at a time when coherence across partnership boards needs to be increased with concomitant admin support increase.

APPENDIX F – AREA BASED GRANT

18. It is not clear how the community, and in particular cultural needs, have been involved in determining what the grant is used for. Especially considering the inclusion of previously ring-fenced funds, e.g. para 8.1 re ‘Supporting People Grant’. Nor it is clear which Partnership Boards have been consulted on this.