

NOTES OF INFORMAL MEETING BETWEEN DCC CLLR ROBERT GOULD AND JIM BIGGIN OF ACRA

1. The meeting was held at DCC on Wednesday 27th May 2015 with the objective of updating the current DCC financial position as at the start of the 2015-16 financial year and communicating that to ACRA members.
2. This meeting was deliberately deferred until after the May General Election in case that election introduced a completely new political landscape that could have caused a re-evaluation of previous assumptions and plans. In the event no such reappraisal was necessary and the underlying assumption remains that Central Government will continue to squeeze Local Government much as it has over the last few years.
3. At the start of 2014-15 DCC needed to find savings of £9.8 million. Such savings were identified but not fully realised. This necessitated a transfer from contingency reserves and, subject to final audit, there was excess spending during the year of nearly £3 million, which has been carried over as an additional saving to be found. The main causes of this overspend were, as ever, the demand led services such as Children's services. In addition to the claw-back of the £3 million overspend, the savings required for 2015-16 are now £15 million of which £5 million is currently at risk.
4. Total savings made so far by the various programmes amount to £60 million per annum – a truly eye watering sum. ACRA asked if DCC could provide some summaries of some of the successful projects that would highlight how savings were first identified and then achieved as this would be of considerable interest to residents.
5. The whole situation remains tight and continues to create heightened stress levels in staff at all levels. DCC sickness and absence rates continue at a level that gives rise to managerial concern and action is being taken to address the problem.
6. It is now inevitable that core DCC services such as Legal will now come under the managerial spotlight. For all such services management must review: what services are provided; how they are provided; whether or not they should be outsourced; and so on.
7. The Leader's Growth Board that involves DCC, Bournemouth and Poole has been functioning satisfactorily and has succeeded in coordinating the activities of the various Local Enterprise Partnerships. The option of forming a Combined Authority to promote economic prosperity is being progressed over the summer.
8. The Local Authority Trading Company has been created and also includes Bournemouth and Poole. Called Tricuro, it is a company that will provide Adult and Community Services to the people of Dorset in the same way the county council does now, but is a separate organisation that can generate revenue by developing and providing services to those who wish to pay for their own care. This will hopefully offset some of the demand led services overspending. See <https://www.dorsetforyou.com/latc> for details.
9. Schools continue to switch to Academy Status and, as previously predicted, the overall effect is to cause fragmentation of support services thereby reducing the effectiveness and productivity of the central overhead spend.
10. The pressure from Central Government for DCC to work with local Health Authorities remains. Whilst on paper this seems a sensible idea its implementation requires organisations of differing cultures to function as a team and such relationships are always fraught with difficulties. The extent to which this will really work and whether or not it will save money should become clearer over the rest of this financial year.
11. Our next meeting will be held in October 2015.

Jim Biggin
May 2015