

Committee: Environment Committee
Date: 20 January 2009
Title: Lead officer's Report
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Agenda Item

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Item for information

Summary

This report updates matters that are not covered elsewhere on the agenda. It advises of the current position on concessionary fares, NATS proposed changes to airspace, the eco-towns planning policy statement and the interauthority waste agreement.

Concessionary Fares

The 2008/09 original budget was approved in February 2008 and the new scheme began on 1 April 2008. The new scheme differed significantly from its predecessor and the budget was based on the best information available at the time.

The Department for Transport (DFT) announced in the summer that a Special Grant would be payable to assist with the initial set-up costs but the amount and specific criteria was to be approved later in the year. The council obtained confirmation of the amount and criteria in November 2008.

A mid year change in the conditions of the scheme plus a larger than expected take-up meant that at the time of setting the revised budget (November) the forecast costs had increased by £51,000 giving a revised budget of £308,000

	2008/09	2008/09
	Original	Revised
	£	£
UDC Budget	257,000	160,890
DFT Special Grant	0	147,110
	<u>257,000</u>	<u>308,000</u>

Forecast spend for the current financial year is as follows

Actual Spend	2008/09
	£
Spend to 31 December 2008	278,050
Committed to 31 March 09	<u>38,800</u>
	316,850

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▪ Less Revised Budget	▪ <u>308,000</u>
▪ Projected Overspend	▪ 8,850

Each quarter actual charges against contribution paid are calculated and the council either pays the additional sum or receives a refund for an overpayment. Previous years have seen additional payments in the first quarter and then small refunds in each of the following quarters as usage tails off during the winter. Quarter 1 saw an additional payment made of £8,200 which will be offset by small refunds in the following 3 quarters if the previous year trends continue. If this happens it will reduce the projected overspend.

From 1 April 2009 Essex County Council is taking on responsibility for the delivery of the scheme. The Council will retain the responsibility and associated costs of issuing the passes. It is possible that the projected overspend will increase as supplier and legal costs associated with the transfer are charged to each authority.

NATS Proposed Changes to Airspace

The current position as advised by NATS is the subject of a report to the Stansted Airport Advisory Panel on 15 January. NATS has responded to the request for a further meeting with Members by saying that it will consider such a meeting if it decides that further consultation on proposed changes to airspace is necessary. It has not yet determined if it will bring forward any significant revised proposals in response to the issues raised in consultation which closed in June 2008.

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Eco towns Planning Policy Statement

The consultation period on the PPS has been extended until 6 March. The Housing Minister agreed to this extension because of the Judicial Review of the Stage 1 consultation (April – June 2008), which is to be heard in the High Court on 22 and 23 January. The Council's response agreed at the meeting in November referred to the need to be able to comment on the viability assessment work the Government has commissioned from a team being led by Price Waterhouse Cooper. The assessment, which will consider the viability and deliverability of an eco-town compliant with the standards in the draft PPS, including measures to mitigate impacts and issues identified in the sustainability appraisal, in each remaining location, will be published by the first week of February at the latest.

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Inter Authority Waste Agreement

It had been anticipated that there would be a report for the meeting but the document is not in its final form and hence not yet ready for consideration by this Committee. An oral update will be available at the meeting, this will also confirm to Members when the Inter Authority Agreement will be formally considered. A briefing note for Members is appended to this report.