



meeting **COUNTY COUNCIL**

date **6 MAY 2004**

REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND PROPERTY

Section A – Finance

1. The Council Tax bills for 2004/5 have now been distributed by the District Councils. An experiment was undertaken in the Bassetlaw area to combine the information from the County Council, District Council, Police Authority and Fire Authority into one leaflet for Council Tax payers to read. In the rest of the County, there was a combined leaflet from the County Council, Police Authority and Fire Authority. In addition to presenting the information in a more joined-up way, there are also some cost savings from this approach.
2. The level of response to the County Council's Council Tax increase of 4.9% seems to have been more muted than in previous years. There have been fewer letters than last year, and telephone calls have been handled by the Contact Centre at Mansfield. Nevertheless, there continues to be concerns about Council Tax levels, particularly amongst pensioners organisations. Some of the earlier responses during the consultation period have been published in the recent edition of County News.
3. One of the features of the National Budget last March was a proposal to pay £100 to every household with someone aged 70 or over to help with their Council Tax bills in 2004/5. This was to recognise the position of older people on fixed income where Council Tax bills take up a higher share of their incomes than the rest of the population. Much of the National Budget concentrated on the next Spending Review to be announced in July 2004. The Chancellor indicated that the spending plans already announced for 2005/6 were secure, and in later years there would be an average increase in current spending in real terms of 2½% per annum in 2006/7 and 2007/8. The highest percentage increases are planned for Education and Children's Social Services,

and this may mean that the increases for all other services will be much lower. The Chancellor was clearly expecting substantial reductions in the number of Civil Servants, and this quest for efficiency savings may well also impact on Local Authorities through the next RSG settlement.

4. It is clearly important that we start work on the budget for 2005/6 and later years as early as practicable, and I have already had a number of discussions with Cabinet colleagues about the issues that the County Council is facing for future years.

Section B – Property

1. In the period from 17 February 2004 to 22 April 2004 six Property Progress Meetings took place at which 33 separate reports were discussed. These went on to the next Finance and Property Portfolio Meetings at which 37 separate reports were presented for discussion with a total value of £2.5M.
2. A lease is being taken on Prospect House, Padge Road, Beeston, for a new County Office. The fitting out will be undertaken during the summer for occupation in early September 2004. We are still negotiating for the purchase of a site in Sutton-in-Ashfield for the proposed new Ashfield Area Office.
3. The 2003/4 planned building maintenance programme of works is complete with a forecast out-turn of 100% and the 2004/5 programme has been allocated.
4. The programming of projects for the £1Million DDA Works allocation for 2004/05 has been completed and the works have started.
5. The project for the refurbishment of the Culture and Community Services Department accommodation on the fourth floor of County Hall and at Thoroton Road, West Bridgford is progressing satisfactorily for a completion date in August 2004.
6. The project for the repair of the River Maun culvert at Meadow House has received grant aid from the Environment Agency and a planning application has been made for an anticipated start on site in May 2004.
7. The corporate property strategy has been adopted as from April 2004 and will include measurable targets and PI's for property to help improve the Council's service outputs. The division is developing the Best Value review into the implementation of the property strategy, which is due to be completed by September 2004. This will examine existing policies and practices for property management and is expected to endorse the work being done to complete the property

strategy. It is hoped this work could lead to the Council being awarded Beacon Status in asset management.

8. The Extra Care development in Southwell is ahead of plan and is now expected to open in August. Work continues to secure funding and sites for the mixed care developments in Rushcliffe, Mansfield and Ashfield. Tenders for the Project Manager have been received so the work on detailed design can commence.
9. The total capital receipts generated in 2003/04 was £17M and exceeded the previous year's figure by 20%. There is now the expectation that this will again be exceeded in the new financial year.
10. The Gedling Local Plan Inquiry has recently been completed with the County Council as landowner promoting Top Wighay Farm. The Inspector's report is due in May 2004.
11. As a result of successfully promoting county owned sites in the Review of the Ashfield Local Plan, three sites have now been marketed on terms previously agreed which will see approximately 33 acres of residential land being developed.
12. The annual revaluation of the County Council's property assets has now been completed.

COUNCILLOR JOHN CARTER
Cabinet Member for Finance & Property