

The following are frequently asked questions that arose throughout the consultation period. The majority of questions received were concerned with the financial position, the proposals to the Museum and Tourism, CCTV, Public Conveniences, Speed and parking, Dover Town Hall, Area Offices and the general appearance of the District. Where possible questions have been answered individually, however, to avoid duplication for some issues representative questions are shown.

The financial situation of the Council:

Q.1 *How did the Council find itself in this financial situation and how will it be ensured this does not happen again? How independent will the process be and how open to public scrutiny?*

A.1 The position has been recognised for several years and plans to remedy the situation were formulated as early as 1998. At that time the policy was to maintain a relatively low level of council tax and use existing reserves on a planned basis to balance the budget. Subsequently, a number of substantial, unavoidable growth items consistently placed extra strains upon the budget which, inevitably, increased the scale of the problem and the required solution. Amongst others, these were:

- Major increases in external contract prices
- Increases in concessionary fare scheme, imposed by central government without full recompense
- The Dover local plan enquiry
- Substantial costs associated with local government modernisation and best value
- Reducing returns on investments because of the global economy.

As a result, balances continued to diminish whilst base revenue expenditure continued to increase.

The present budget re-alignment will ensure that budgets henceforth are not reliant upon withdrawals from reserves and that expenditure is restricted to available annual resources. The whole process is open to public scrutiny as demonstrated by the consultation exercises and budget setting at public open meetings.

Q.2 *Perhaps if the Councillors had concentrated on managing the finances properly we would not be in this mess*

A.2 The Council has given constant attention to the problem for several years and has made political judgements on expenditure and taxation levels. For the reasons stated above, it has taken longer to find a solution than was first anticipated.

Q.3 *Our Council taxes went up this year and yet our services are being cut. Where has the money gone/is the money going?*

A.3 Although taxes have risen marginally above inflation rates, the levels of taxation in Dover are just about the lowest in Kent. The problems of balancing budgets is faced by authorities across the country, and some have taken a stance of imposing substantially greater tax burdens upon the community, although it should be recognised that for three years there was effectively a tax cap imposed by central government. The factors referred to in the first question/answer have meant that increased expenditure demands have persistently outstripped additional resources in

recent times. If reserves had not been used prudently, cuts would have had to be imposed earlier and more arbitrarily, and services would have been affected more adversely.

Q.4 *Has DDC financial difficulties anything to do with the building of the White Cliffs Experience and accruing debts attributed to that project – if not, what has?*

A.4 The White Cliffs Experience was constructed without serious impact on revenue reserves or accruing debt. Essentially, a business plan was implemented which involved releasing capital resources from existing assets that were no longer assisting the provision of services and reinvested into this major tourism project. Consequently, the capital investment is not a factor in the present difficulties. Clearly, the running expenses of the project have been a call upon the revenue budget in the years the centre was operational and the Council took the decision to make this annual investment into the local economy as a way of protecting employment and business opportunities within the District.

Q.5 *How can Councillors consider taking the proposed increase in allowances?*

A.5 Members have chosen not to accept the increases in Members Allowances, recommended by the independent report and, therefore, in the 2003/2004 budget there will be no provision built in to allow for any increases. The Cabinet has recommended a medium term financial plan which assumes that no increases will be implemented until the 2005/06 financial year, at which time the additional cost could be absorbed without causing a budget deficit.

Q.6 *Have people been asked if they would be interested in paying more Council Tax to keep services?*

A.6 This question has not been posed specifically, but has been raised during the recent extensive consultation process. Individual Members will of course be representative of the views and opinions of their constituents, which would be reflected in the local taxation policy. The difficulty in seeking approval to tax increases for specific purposes is that various elements of the community will have varying opinions on what those purposes should be, however, as this has been commented on by various members of the public future consultation may present options to Council Tax payers. The Council is currently working on a Council Tax Strategy.

Dover Museum and Tourism:

Q.7 *Why has the Museum been dealt with such drastic cuts? We have a fine Museum and dedicated staff.*

A.7 All services have to take a share of the proposed cuts. The Museum is very highly regarded but the Council cannot continue to sustain its operation at the current level. The Bronze Age Boat exhibition is not affected. Taking into account the results of the consultation process the Dover Museum will be continued in its current premises on all three floors, however, there will be a reduction in staffing and opening hours. An Education Resource Centre will be created to replace the temporary exhibitions gallery and there will be an increase in admission prices to £2 for adults and £1.25 for children and senior citizens. Admission will remain free to all Dover District residents

Q.8 *Dover Museum is one of the few highlights of Dover tourist attractions. If all the staff expertise is lost it is a loss to the potential for tourism within the area. If the proposed cuts resulted in the Museum losing their Museum Registration status it would preclude them from obtaining outside grants and it would deprive at least four small museums of their Curatorial Advisors, thus putting their status at risk. Direct concern are proposals to reduce staff at the Museum, curtail exhibitions and reduce opening hours to such an extent that it may result in the loss of national registration and therefore the ability to attract outside funds.*

A.8 The Council is very conscious of the importance of Dover Museum retaining their Museum registration both in terms of accessing grants and the knock on effect for the small museums in the District.

Q.9 *Who is going to market our District, White Cliffs Country? Who is going to bring tourists to our towns? What commitment do DDC have to tourism? Are people aware of the value of tourism in the District? Most of the cuts seem not to encourage or meet the needs of Tourism in the area, which after all is the only asset and is the one thing that enables hotels and boarding houses etc to exist and to pay their rates etc...*

A.9 The Council recognises the importance of Tourism to the District. The Council also realises that it has a role to support the promotion of tourism. It will continue to work closely with our partners in East Kent and locally, including WCCTA to maximise the impact of our activity. Although the Tourism publications budget is being reduced by £40,000, in light of the overwhelming response concerning tourism consideration is being given to ring-fencing part of the Council tax to be solely spent on tourism and related issues

Q.10 *Some of the attractions in the town are being dumbed down to the extent that it would distract people from coming to visit. Dover Museum and Town Hall are major attractions and closure on many days demonstrates the lack of understanding in the Council of the benefits of these attractions. Together with the truncating of the Tourism and Arts and Events budget is just shortsighted. The knock on effect should be assessed. There seems to be no good reason why companies should support in future enterprise activities in the District. Why is 85% of arts budget being cut when it brings tourism to the area?*

A.10 Partners are still being sought for the running of the Town Hall, it is a recommendation that the Town Hall be closed only when there are no activities taking place inside, to reduce staff costs. The Council has previously invested heavily in Arts and Events. The networks that exist are now much stronger and many more events take place now that when the Council embarked on the original approach. Organisations such as Town Councils now take a much more active role. The Council will continue to have grants available for Arts and events.

Q.11 *Why must we lose the fountain in the Market Square, Dover? It is a focal point for visitors and locals alike?*

A.11 Following consultation, the Council has considered the representations made to it and the fountain in the Market Square, Dover, will be maintained.

Q.12 *The Council ought to be spending more not less on marketing and publicising what Dover has, not reducing the spend, they should be creating an increase in tourism, not shutting it down.*

A.12 The potential for partnership funding continues to be explored with KCC, English Heritage, Dover Town Council and local companies. Initial reaction has been that there are not large sums available and interest is really for project funding

CCTV:

Q.s 13 **A number of questions/concerns were raised around the proposals to reduce CCTV monitoring:**

- Q.** *If the CCTV proposal is successful, the Council will be guilty of producing a timetable for criminals which will ruin the evening economy and leave the police, citizens and business in danger. If we are a Partnership Against Crime there is no advantage in part-time membership.*
- Q.** *Why have CCTV cameras if no monitoring?*
- Q.** *Have the Council calculated the cost of increased crime, due to shutting down CCTV at certain times?*
- Q.** *CCTV monitors are vital to the police and response rates, if they are only to be monitored at peak times those times will need to be very carefully considered.*
- Q.** *There is a contradiction between the proposal to scale down CCTV and the recognition that keeping crime down is the second most popular issue in maintaining Dover District as a good place to live.*

A. 13 Following consultation, the Council has considered the representations made to it and the CCTV service has not been subjected to the level of cuts originally proposed. There will be no reduction in CCTV monitoring.

Public Conveniences:

Q.s 14 **Consultation highlighted a number of concerns around the proposed closure of some public conveniences:**

- Q.** *335 Dover Express cuttings have been received saying no to the closure of public toilets.*
- Q.** *There is a Health and Safety issue in so far as people who are out for picnics etc... are unable to wash their hands*
- Q.** *Public toilets are a basic human need and should be kept open*
- Q.** *Can you charge for loos to keep them open?*
- Q** *Cleanliness should not be compromised this includes toilets*
- Q.** *Elderly and people with urinary problems rely on being able to use public toilets when they go out, shutting them would not only affect tourists, but locals alike.*

A.14 The closure, albeit partial in some cases, of toilets announced earlier this year sparked a great deal of interest including the submission of 335 cuttings from the Dover Express. Some of the toilets are not used to a level which make them viable. It is our hope that working with Parish Councils the number of toilets to be closed can be minimised.

Following the consultation the Council has considered representations and public conveniences have not been subjected to the level of cuts originally proposed. Public conveniences at The Strand in Walmer and at St.Margarets to be reopened and public conveniences to be kept open at Aycliffe, Buckland, Reach Road in St.Margarets, Ash, Wingham, Hamilton Road in Deal and Aylesham Cemetary. However, the public conveniences are to be closed at South Street in Deal and Eastry.

Parking and Speed:

Qs.15 Parking and speed prompted a number of questions during the consultation process:

Q. Parents of children at local schools seem to think it is quite acceptable to park on double yellow lines with at least 2 wheels on the pavement, outside these establishments. These drivers are concentrating on the traffic not on the pedestrians they are knocking down in their path along the pavement. Why are traffic wardens ignoring this illegal and dangerous parking which is jeopardising the safety of pedestrians, especially children? It is only a matter of time before a fatal accident occurs.

Q. What does the Council propose doing about the unlawful parking of vehicles on footpaths which now seems common practice in the area? I was told by a traffic warden that 5 mins parking is allowed on double yellow lines before a summons is issued. Is this true? Parking on the footpath presents very serious dangers with prams and wheelchairs being forced into the road. Is there a remedy before an injury occurs?

Q. Why is the health and safety of residents compromised in certain roads in Deal?

A.15 Stopping outside of school entrances is potentially very dangerous. Recognising this, contact was made with all schools in the District prior to this Council taking responsibility for parking enforcement and where requested have prohibited stopping outside of schools between 8.30 - 9.30 and 2.30 to 4.00 p.m. Monday to Friday in term time.

These parking restrictions apply to over 40 schools in the towns of Deal, Dover, Sandwich and in many villages. It is our policy for a parking attendant to attend all schools in the morning and afternoons on a regular basis and more often at schools with a particular problem.

A manager in Parking Services acts as the schools liaison officer and has regular contact with School Heads. Our experience is that schools are supportive and regularly remind parents of the danger of parking outside schools but these warnings are often ignored by the parents of those the regulations are intended to protect.

The Road Traffic Acts permit a vehicle to wait in a restricted area to load or unload. An illegally parked vehicle is observed prior to issuing a penalty charge notice to ensure the driver is not loading or unloading, but this concession does not apply to stopping outside of schools.

Parking Attendants will enforce all parking regulations during the hours of operation and this will result in car parks being patrolled in the mornings and afternoons but with priority and resources being given to patrolling schools. We do not have the resources to place an attendant at every school and we need the public to recognise the potential danger being created for children.

Area Offices:

The consultation highlighted a number of concerns around the proposals to Area Offices:

- Q's. 16** *The staff at the Area Offices are always of great help and comfort. To change the routine of many people (especially the elderly) would be very upsetting.*
- Q.** *166 signatures received from Sandwich Area Office opposing the closure of the cash office.*
- Q.** *How do you justify the extra expense caused to pensioners and the low incomeed by withdrawing payment facilities at Area Offices?*
- Q.** *The closure of rent offices will unfairly affect the elderly and disabled*

A.16 Following the consultation the Council has considered representations and Area Offices will not be subjected to the level of cuts originally proposed. There will be the introduction of direct debit as a method of payment and an extension of the use of Debit and Credit card payment facilities at Area Offices. Area Offices will continue to accept cash payments.

District Appearance:

Q.17 *What action does the Council propose to take regarding the ever-increasing problem of litter/domestic dumping which is a disgrace to our towns and countryside?*

A.17 There is no evidence that the level of domestic dumping is increasing. The main issues in this District relate to abandoned cars and commercially dumped rubbish usually termed 'fly tipping'. These problems are not unique to Dover and so along with all the other Districts in Kent we are tackling them as part of a County wide initiatives.

A task group is currently looking at how fly tipping can be best approached to make sure the persons or businesses dumping the rubbish be held responsible for the cost of disposal, or be subject to statutory action.

A Countywide scheme for tackling Abandoned Vehicles is already successfully running. Known as Operation Cubit, it involves the District Council, County Council and Police working with DVLA to remove and dispose of untaxed and abandoned vehicles.

Q.18 *From the subway to Buckland Bridge, property owners should be made to tidy their frontage, derelict buildings to be demolished or rebuilt. Hastings has done it why not us?*

A. 18 The area identified in this question is classified as Zone 1 for the purposes of street sweeping. This means they are swept before 8.00a.m. and then monitored and appropriately dealt with during the course of the day.

Through its Private Sector Housing Strategy the District Council aims to ensure living accommodation in the private sector, which includes accommodation over shops is fit for human habitation. This includes repair to the exterior of the building such as to roofs and rainwater goods, but does not address the aesthetic appearance.

The scheme in Hastings to its private properties involves, I believe, a significant amount of grant aid from the Local Authority. Currently this Authority deals only with

Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants and Renovation grants. No budget has been set aside for additional discretionary payments

Q.19 *This present Council has announced severe cuts in spending in Deal and Sandwich. With the state of finances at Dover District Council, what in your opinion will happen to these areas if they are not given financial investment?*

A.19 The Council is continuing to invest in projects throughout the District. In Deal, for example, some £2million is being spent over the next two years to refurbish the Pier. The Council is working in partnership with a number of organisations, particularly in North Deal, for example, Golf Road Community Company, to develop a Community Centre on the North Deal Playing Fields. The Council is also committed to £50,000 towards the refurbishment of Sandwich Sports Centre.

Q.20 *Town is not something to boast about with run down areas and buildings. The walk from Market Square to sea is a mess, what will happen to it now?*

A.20 The Council is working with a development partner to undertake a comprehensive redevelopment of the St.James area of Dover (Dover Town Investment Zone). This will considerably improve the appearance of the area and facilities available to residents.

Q.21 *A reduction in bulk waste collection is likely to result in an increase in fly-tipping, how will this be dealt with?*

A.21 Following consultation, the Council has considered the representations made to it and the bulk waste collection will be maintained.

General:

A number of general concerns were raised during the consultation:

Q.s. 22 *Concern was expressed at the proposed cuts, particularly charging for Deal Pier, closing of public toilets – how can the hardship thus caused to hundreds of residents be justified?*

Q. *The proposed changes to Walmer paddling pool and the potential increase in crime occasioned by the proposed reduction in CCTV services. It is felt that these cuts can only cause harm to the greatest number of inhabitants – was this your Councils intention?*

Q. *Regret that 3 particular areas are affected: arts and events largely to cease, health promotion to be discontinued, increased charges at leisure centres, playschemes and walmer paddling pool. These may be regarded as non-essential, however a significant proportion of Dover's population is socially disadvantaged and culturally deprived.*

Q. *How much of central government now finds its way into Dover District Council by means of controlled agendas, predetermined plans and policies, fixed facilities, selective/selected services, IT and creeping interference, at the same time as reduction in certain justifiably important service requirements, funded by Council Tax payers, by/through the backdoor.*

A. 22 It is with regret that any savings/reductions in services or higher charges have to be made at all. Unfortunately wherever these changes are made some residents will be affected. Part of the Council's aim in realigning its budgets is to

take on board social inclusion. Although changes are proposed in play scheme, for example, the proposals allow for free admission for children from families receiving Council Tax benefits.

Following the consultation there will be no charge for Walmer Paddling Pool or Deal Pier as originally proposed.

Health Promotion and Home Energy Conservation will continue to be supported through Project DELTA .

Having listened to the views of the residents there will be no reduction in CCTV monitoring.

A response to the issues surrounding Arts and Events has been given at Q.10.