

Town Clerk's Briefing February 2009

The Town Clerk Chris Duffield has recently held briefings for all City employees about the effects of the current economic recession on them. After some reasonably apologetic remarks about the profile the City has adopted over the years in advocating deregulation and free market economy, he, his deputy Susan Attard and Chamberlain Chris Bilsland outlined the effects which they foresee will come to bear.

They noted the sudden arrival of a slate of Labour Party candidates on the forthcoming March Court of Common Council elections – a local initiative, not a national campaign, so not necessarily a threat to the non-partisan nature of local politics, they said.

Then they listed the financial impact on the City's three funds – Revenue, Cash and Bridge House Trust.

The figures for the last two, forecast from now until 2012, were clearly based on an optimistic return to edifying accumulation (although, since City Cash accounts are never published, it would be foolish to take those amounts seriously).

The point was that City Fund (Revenue) figures, on which the City has riveted its expenditure since 1998, showed an increasing deficit. That deficit was what, they declared, they would fix their plans on - £20 million pounds.

What would they do?

Well, central government had let them off remitting all the rates. They'd have an extra ten million as a result. Problem is, that largely goes to Crossrail, the chief debtor and favourite infrastructure baby for the City's future free-market viability.

Then they'd lower the proposed annual increase in budgets for services to just one per cent.

Then, interestingly, they'd identify those services which were – perhaps arbitrarily – funded from revenue and re-designate them as funded by City Cash.

Neatly, at the end, Deputy Town Clerk Susan Attard skated over the meat of the technique we would have to deal with: centralising services such as Human Resources, accounts, information services, telephone answering, procurement – and at least she had a swipe at the density of the City's website, promising improvement.

But this is to miss out the appearance of Chrissie Morgan, City HR Director, whose mission it was to persuade the audience that they were most favoured in a time of utter gloom. In a straw poll of employees, she said, the majority thought their chances of redundancy in public service were much reduced by comparison with the private sector – on a scale of 1 –10 (10 being supremely confident), public services got 5-6 as opposed to 1-3 for the rest. Chris Duffield, she said, had rated City employees at 9.

Malcolm Key
Branch Secretary