

To: Cabinet

Date: 9 February 2021

Report/Comments of: Scrutiny Committee

Title: Scrutiny of the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy

SUMMARY OF REPORT CONSIDERED

Report Title:	Scrutiny of the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy
Purpose/Description of Report:	To provide feedback to Cabinet on the Budget And Medium Term Financial Strategy
Key Decision:	Council Decision
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor P Cumbers
Relevant Portfolio Holder:	Councillor J Orson/Councillor R de Burle

1. Introduction and Overview

The Scrutiny Committee met on 26 January 2021 to consider the proposed General Fund Revenue Budget 2021/22 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021/22 to 2024/25, the proposed Capital Programme 2021/22 and the Housing Revenue Account Revenue Budget Proposals 2021/22

All Members were invited to attend the Scrutiny Meeting to ensure that no member was excluded from providing feedback on the Council's Budget proposals for 2020/21.

The Leader and Members of Cabinet along with all Senior Leadership Team officers were present

2. Summary of Feedback/Recommendations for Cabinet Consideration

- The Project Support Officer should not be frozen as this post was important in ensuring programmes can be delivered;
- Empty properties have had an impact on Council Tax and the Housing Revenue Account, information was requested regarding the cost to the

council and the measures being taken to ensure voids were reduced and properties were improved to ensure long term tenancies;

- There had been a significant swing away from Special Expenses to General Expenses with regard to council tax. Spending in both the Town and in rural areas was considered important.
- A request was made to carry over the underspend in the current year's Mayor's Budget to the 21/22 year.
- The increase in Audit Fees by £20K was highlighted. It was noted that this was an estimate and the actual cost was still unknown;
- The small investment in the Town Centre was noted, but Cabinet were asked to consider what more could be done to support business' and increase investment across the Borough and especially in the Town;
- Increasing the accommodation offer would be important in attracting more visitors to the area;
- There was some doubt as to whether the town improvements would definitely go ahead as this was expressed in the report as being subject to the economic climate, Members felt that this investment was imperative to boost the economy of the town;
- Members queried the vacancy of the Economic Development Post and felt this would be an important role in the recovery of the Borough;
- Further information was requested regarding the Place Survey and the associated expenditure of £15K. It was noted this was a bi-annual exercise and would provide important evidence regarding the delivery of services in relation to Priority 6 of the Corporate Strategy;
- Community Grants had reduced in recent years, it was requested that this be reviewed and options for increasing these grants be looked at. A list of grants awarded was also requested (It was noted that a report on allocation of funding was scheduled for 9 February 2021 Cabinet);
- It was suggested that Cabinet might consider using Service Level Agreements with some of the larger Community Grants. That could help the recipients of the grants to use the grant in accordance with our Corporate Priorities and help demonstrate to taxpayers that we are using taxpayer funds wisely:
- Cabinet were asked to consider innovative ways that the Council can use their own resources to increase income and support those most in need, as had been done for service charges;
- The Stock Condition Survey had not yet been completed, but would be important in understanding the demands on the Budget and Capital Programme going forward; and
- Further information was requested regarding the increase in operating costs against the Christmas Lights for 21/22.

Written by: Scrutiny Committee Chairman in consultation with Members of the Scrutiny Committee