

To: Cabinet
Date: 9 February 2022
Report/Comments of: Scrutiny Committee
Title: Scrutiny feedback on the Budget Proposals

SUMMARY OF REPORT CONSIDERED

Report Title:	Scrutiny feedback on the Budget Proposals
Purpose/Description of Report:	To provide feedback to Cabinet on the budget proposals
Key Decision:	Council Decision
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor R Child
Relevant Portfolio Holder:	Councillor R de Burle/Councillor R Browne

1. Introduction and Overview

The Scrutiny Committee met on 25 January 2022 to consider the following budget reports:

- General Fund Revenue Budget 2022/23 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 to 2025/26
- Capital Programme 2021-2026 – General Fund and Capital Strategy 2022/23
- Revenue Budget Proposals 2022/23 – Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

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 2022/23.

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

Prior to the meeting on 25 January 2022, Scrutiny conducted a workshop on the budget proposals on 14 December 2021. The following Members participated in the workshop: Councillors Child, Chandler, Douglas, Evans

and Holmes. During the workshop Members discussed the following: growth bids, saving options under consideration, assets, services, discounted savings and the capital programme. Members comments and discussions at the workshop were forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration prior to the publication of the draft budget reports for the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 25 January.

2. Summary of Feedback/Recommendations for Cabinet Consideration

- It was pleasing to see that resources have been allocated for appointing a consultant to work on developing plans for a new cemetery in Melton Mowbray.
- Scrutiny recognised that the estimated cost of a reasonably sized new cemetery would be £1m and there was concern on how it was to be funded, considering there is only £284k in the special expenses fund and that the cost of borrowing would be approximately £40k per annum. The suggestion was made as to whether a new cemetery could be added to the local plan, so that section 106 monies can be allocated towards it.
- A request was made as to whether an updated review could be undertaken into the viability of constructing a crematorium within the Borough. The Committee agreed that this would be a worthwhile exercise.
- Scrutiny questioned what activities would be funded by the Regeneration and Innovation Reserve. Members were assured that they would be updated when it was decided to commit to expenditure.
- A comment was made on why it is proposed that Council Tax is increased considering the favourable financial settlement and the expected budget surplus.
- In reviewing the council tax levels for special expenses areas, it was noted that there is a big variation in what different areas are liable to pay. The comment was made that the reasons for this should be made clear to council tax payers.
- It was believed that the Project Officer post should remain and that it would be a worthwhile £38k investment. The comment was made that the post could support colleagues managing projects and the Council would retain in-house knowledge of project support.
- Concern was raised over the proposed vacancy saving in the Community Safety Team. It was noted that the team are already stretched and it was believed that additional capacity within the team would help.
- Members questioned whether the Melton Lifeline project would be cost effective and were concerned to hear that a business case had not yet been drafted.
- It was stated that there should be a strategy for managing the Council's assets. This would mean that the Council would know what assets it has and

what can be done with the assets in order to achieve its aims and objectives. In addition, any disposal of assets would receive thorough consideration before they are disposed of.

- Previously a decision was made to dispose of the car park at the Cattle Market but that it did not happen. The comment was made that if the Council has an asset to dispose of in order to reinvest, then that is what should be happening.
- The comment was made that for the sixth consecutive year there would be an underspend on the Council's HRA Capital Programme of £2.6m. Considering the Council is promoting decent homes, it was questioned as to why the budget had not been spent.
- Following comment on the budget underspend, the question was asked whether budget holders had attended budget training. Scrutiny was assured that the 2022/23 budget would be fully spent, as per the approved capital programme.
- The £100k for Fairmead regeneration was raised as a point of interest for Scrutiny and the question was raised whether it was the right priority.

The various questions and comments were responded to by Officers at the time and a record of these responses will be available in the minutes.

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